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# NO CALL HER MINE

BY  
WALTER BESANT



GEO. MUNRO,  
17 to 27 Vandewater St., NEW YORK



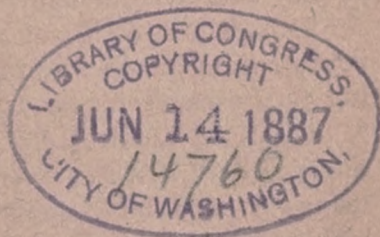




# TO CALL HER MINE.

A NOVEL.

By WALTER BESANT.



NEW YORK:  
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,  
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET,



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# TO CALL HER MINE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DAVID MAKES A STATEMENT.

"I WILL now," said the German, "read your statement over, and you can sign it if you like. Remember, however, what your signature may mean. As for what I shall do with it afterward, depends on many things."

"Do what you like with it," replied the Englishman, slowly and huskily. "Send it to the police in London, if you like. I don't care what becomes of it, or of myself either. For I am tired of it; I give in. There! I give in. No one knows what it is like until you actually come to fight with it."

He did not explain what "it" was; but the other seemed to understand what he meant, and nodded his head gravely, though coldly. "It," spoken of in this way, is generally some foe to man. If toothache, or earache, or any ordinary physical evil, had been meant, that German, or any other German, Frenchman, Russian, or Englishman would have nodded his head with a sympathetic murmur. Since there was no murmur, therefore there was no sympathy.

The two men were, as you will presently admit, a most curious couple to look upon, set among most remarkable surroundings, if only there had been any spectators or audience to watch and admire them. The scene—none of your conventional carpenter's scenes, but a grand set scene—was, if possible, more interesting than the couple in the foreground. For in front there stretched the sea-shore, the little waves lapping softly and creeping slowly over the level white coral sand; beyond the smooth water lay the coral reef with its breakers; at the back of the sandy shores was a gentle rise of land, covered with groves of cocoa-



palms and bananas; among them were clearings planted with fields of sweet potatoes and taro; two or three huts were visible beneath the trees. Again, beyond the level belt rose a great green mountain, five or six thousand feet high, steep, and covered to the summit with forest. Here and there a perpendicular cliff broke the smoothness of the slope, and over the cliff leaped tiny cascades—threads of light sparkling in the evening sunshine. The time was about six—that is, an hour before sunset; the air was warm and soft; the sloping sunshine lay on grove and clearing, sea-shore and mountain-side, forest and green field, making everything glow with a splendid richness and prodigality of color, softening outlines and bringing out new and unsuspected curves on the hill-side. The midday sun makes these thick forests black with shade; the evening sun lights them up, and makes them glorious and warm with color.

As one saw the place this evening, one might see it every evening, for in New Ireland there is neither summer nor winter, but always, all the year round, the promise of spring, the heat of summer, and the fruition of autumn; with no winter at all, except the winter of death, when the branches cease to put forth leaves, and stretch out white arms, spectral and threatening, among their living companions in the forest. Sometimes one may see whole acres of dead forest standing like skeletons by day and like ghosts by night, till the white-ants shall have gnawed their way through the trunks to prepare their fall, and till the young shoots at their feet shall have sprung up round them to hide the ghastly whiteness of death. The reason of this commingling of spring and summer, autumn and winter, is that the latitude of New Ireland, as everybody knows, is about four degrees south, which is very near the isothermal line. People who desire to feel the warmth of this latitude—a warmth which goes right through and through a man, like light through a pane of glass—need not go so far as New Ireland, but may stop on their way at Singapore, where there are not only no cannibals, but the hotels—there are no hotels in New Ireland—are “replete,” as the advertisements say, “with every comfort.”

Considering that New Ireland has been visited by so very few, and that the place is as yet entirely unexplored, the fact that here were two Europeans upon it at the same



time, and yet not arrived there with the same objects, was in itself remarkable; the more so because its people have a curious and cultivated taste in cookery, and prefer roasted Brother Man to the roast of any other animal, insomuch that missionaries have hitherto avoided these shores, feeling that to be killed and eaten before converting anybody would be a sinful waste of good joints. After the conversion of many, indeed, the thing might take the form and present the attractions of serviceable martyrdom.

Where the situation and the scene were both so remarkable, it seems almost superfluous to point out that the appearance of both men was also remarkable; although, among such surroundings, any man might well strive to live and present an appearance up to the scene. One of them—the German—was a man of colossal proportions, certainly six feet in height, and broad in proportion, with strong shoulders and well-shaped legs—both legs and shoulders being bare, and therefore in evidence. He was still quite a young man—well under thirty. His hair was light brown, short and curly; an immense brown beard covered his face and fell over his chest. His eyes were blue and prominent, and he wore spectacles. His dress was modeled generally, but with modifications, on the dress of the inhabitants of these islands. His only robe was a great piece of Feejee tapu cloth, white, decorated with black lozenges and a brown edging; it was rolled once round his waist, descending to his knees, and was then thrown over his left shoulder, leaving the right arm bare. The sun had painted this limb a rich warm brown. He wore a cap something like that invented, and patented for the use of solitaires, by Robinson Crusoe: it was conical in shape, and made of feathers brightly colored. He had sandals of thin bark tied to his feet by leather thongs, and he wore a kind of leather scarf, from which depended a revolver-case, a field-glass in a case, a case of instruments, and a large water-proof bag. These constituted his whole possessions, except a thick cotton umbrella, with a double cover, green below and white above. This he constantly carried open. He was smoking a large pipe of the shape well known in Germany. Lastly, one observed in him a thing so incongruous that it was really the most remarkable of all. You know the Robinson Crusoe of the stage; you know the holy man or the hermit of the Royal Academy. Both the Rob-



inson Crusoe of the stage and the St. Anthony of the desert in the picture are as clean as if they had just come out of the bath, or at least had been quite recently blessed with a heavy shower, and they are, besides, as well-groomed as if they had just completed a careful morning toilet. Now Robinson on his island and the hermit in his desert may have been picturesque, but I am quite certain that they were always unkempt, unclean, and uncared-for. This young man—say this young gentleman—was most carefully groomed, although he was on a cannibal island. His hands were clean, and his nails did not look as if they had been torn off by the teeth (I have often thought of poor Robinson's sufferings in this respect); his face was clean; his hair neatly cut, though it was cut by his own hands, and had been brushed that day; his great beard was carefully combed; and his toga of native cloth was clean. Now a neat and clean beach-comber is a thing never heard of. Always they are in rags; and when they do descend so low as to wear the native dress, they have generally assumed and made their own the manners and customs of a native.

This interesting person was, as I have said, a German. Now what is pedantry in an Englishman is thoroughness in a German. No Englishman could have worn this dress without feeling as if the whole world's finger of scorn was turned upon him; but to the German the dress was part of the programme. He had learned the language, and what he could of the manners, before landing on the shore. A dress as nearly as possible approximating to the Polynesian garb was a natural accompaniment to the language. The spectacles, the umbrella, and the cap of feathers were necessary concessions to European civilization.

The other man, one could see immediately, was an Englishman. It was also clear to any one who had eyes and understanding that he was an Englishman of country birth and breeding. To begin with, his clothes were not those of a sailor. The rough flannel shirt, which [had lost all its buttons and one of its sleeves; the coarse canvas trousers; the old boots broken down at heel, and showing in the toes an inclination—nay, a resolution—for divorce between sole and upper; the broad shapeless felt hat—all spoke of the soil. His gait and carriage sung aloud of plowed fields; his broad and ruddy cheeks, his reddish-brown hair and beard, spoke of the south or west of England. No doubt



he was once—how did such a one contrive to get to the shores of New Ireland?—a farmer or laborer. He was a well-built man, who looked short beside this tall German. But he was above the average height. His age might be about six or eight-and-twenty. His hair hung in masses over his shoulders, and his beard was thicker than his companion's, though not so long; and so far from being clean and trim, he presented a very unwashed, uncombed, and neglected appearance indeed. His face, which had been once a square full face, was drawn and haggard; his eyes, which were meant to be frank, were troubled; and his carriage, which should have been upright and brave, was heavy and dejected. He seemed, as he stood before the other man, at once ashamed and remorseful.

“Listen; I will read it carefully and slowly,” said the German. “Sit down while I read it. If there is a single word that is not true, you can alter that word before you sign.”

The man sat down obediently—there was a curious slowness about his movements as well as his speech—while the German read the document, which was written very closely on two pages of a note-book. Space was valuable, because this note-book contained all the paper there was on the island of New Ireland, and had, therefore, to be husbanded. He read in a good English accent, not making more confusion of his f's and v's than was sufficient to assert his pride of nationality. And as he read he looked down upon the man whose words he was repeating with contempt and astonishment. For the man had done so dreadful and terrible a thing; he had committed a crime which was horrible, and required the white-heat of rage and fury; and yet the man looked so pitiful a creature!

“Listen,” he said again, “and correct me when I am wrong.”

This was the paper which he read on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and on the island of New Ireland, one evening in the year 1884:

“I, David Leighan, farmer, of the parish of Challacombe, Devonshire, being now on an island in the Pacific Ocean, where I expect to be shortly killed and eaten by the cannibals, declare that the following is the whole truth concerning the death of my uncle, Daniel Leighan, of the same parish, farmer.



“He jockeyed me out of my property; he kept on lending me money in large sums and small sums, and making me sign papers in return, and never let me know how much I owed him; he made me mortgage my land to him; he encouraged me to drink, and to neglect my farm. At last, when I was head over ears in debt, he suddenly brought down the law upon me, foreclosed, and took my land. That was the reason of our quarrel. I stayed about the place, sometimes at Challacombe, sometimes at Moreton, and sometimes at Bovey, till my money was nearly all gone. Then I must either starve, or I must become a laborer where I had been a master, or I must go away and find work somewhere else. I had but thirty pounds left in the world, and I made up my mind to go away. It was a day in October of the year 1880, which I remember because it was the cold, wet season of 1879 which finished my ruin, as it did many others, who that year came to the end of their capital or their credit. I went to see my uncle, and begged him to lend me thirty pounds more to start me in Canada, where I’d heard say that fifty pounds will start a man who is willing to make his own clearance and to work. I was that sick of myself that I was willing to work like a negro slave if I could work on my own land. But work in England on another man’s land I could not. Said my uncle—I shall not forget his words—‘Nephew David,’ he said, grinning, ‘you’ve been a fool and lost your money. I’ve been a wise man and kept mine. Do you think I am going to give you more money to fool away?’ I wonder I did not kill him then and there, because it was through him and his lendings that I came so low. He sat in his room at Gratnor, his account-books before him, and he looked up and laughed at me while he said it, jingling the money that was in his pocket. Yet I asked him for nothing but the loan of thirty pounds, which I might pay back, or perhaps I mightn’t. Thirty pounds! And I was his nephew, and by his arts and practices he’d jockeyed me out of a farm of three hundred acres, most of it good land, with the brook running through it and a mill upon it. What was thirty pounds compared with what he’d got out of me?

“I remember very well what I said to him—never mind what it was—but I warrant he laughed no longer, though he kept up his bullying to the end, and told me to go to the devil my own way, and the further from my native par-



ish the better. So I left him, and walked away through Watercourt to John Exon's Inn, where I sat all that day drinking brandy and water. I told nobody what had happened, but they guessed very well that I'd had a quarrel with my uncle, and all the world knew by that time how he'd got my land into his own possession.

"About six o'clock in the evening Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, came to the inn, and Grandfather Derges with him, and they had a mug of cider apiece. And then, being more than a bit in liquor, but not so far gone as not to know what I was saying, I began to talk to them about my own affairs. I told them nothing about the quarrel with my uncle, but I said, what was quite true, that I had no stomach to stay and take laborer's wages in the parish where I should see all day long the land that had been mine and my father's before me, and his father's, further back than the church registry goes. Why, the Sidcotes and the Leighans came to Challacombe together—the Sidcotes to Sidcote Farm, and the Leighans to Berry Down—as everybody knows, when it was nothing but hill-side and forest, with never a house or a field or a church or anything upon it. Therefore I said I should go away, and it was my purpose to go away that very evening. I should walk to Bovey Tracey, I said; I should take the train to Newton-Abbot, and so to Bristol, where I should find a ship bound for foreign parts. That was what I said, and perhaps it was lucky I said so much. But I don't know, because the verdict of the jury I never heard.

" 'Well, Mr. David,' says Harry, the blacksmith, 'you've been an unlucky one, sir, and we wish you better luck where you be going—wherever that may be.' And so said Grandfather Derges. And Mrs. Exon must pour out a last glass of brandy and water, which I took, though I'd had more than enough already. Then we shook hands and I came away.

" 'Twas then about eight, and there was a half-moon, the night being fine and breezy, and flying clouds in the sky. As I crossed the green the thought came into my head that I was a fool to go to Bristol when Plymouth and Falmouth were nearer and would suit my purpose better. I could walk to Plymouth easy, and so save the railway money. Therefore I resolved to change my plan, and instead of turning to the left by Farmer Cummings's, I



turned to the right at Ivy Cottage, and walked across the church-yard, and took the road which goes over Heytree Down to Widdicombe, and then leads to Ashburton and Totnes.

“It was only a chance, mark you, that I took that road; only a chance. I did not know, and I did not suspect, that my uncle had ridden over to Ashburton after I left him. All a chance it was. I never thought to meet him; and he might have been living till now if it hadn’t been for that chance.”

The man who was listening groaned aloud at this point.

“The first two miles of the road is a narrow lane between high hedges. What with the brandy I had taken and the memory of the morning quarrel, I was in as bad a temper as a man need to be, which was the reason why the devil took possession of me.

“Presently I passed through Heytree Gate, and so out where the road runs over the open down, and here I began to think—the devil getting in at my head—what I would do if I had my uncle before me; and the blood came into my eyes, and I clutched the cudgel hard. Who do you think put that thought into my head? The devil. Why did he put that thought into my head? Because the very man was riding along the road on his way home from Ashburton, and because I was going to meet him in about ten minutes.”

“Why,” asked the German, looking up from the paper—“why is it that criminals and ignorant people cling so fondly to their devil?”

As nobody replied, he went on reading:

“I heard the footsteps of his pony a long way off. I was in the middle of the open road when I heard him open Hewed-stone Gate with his hunting-crop and clatter through. I saw him coming along in the moonlight. While he was still a good way off, before I could see his face, I knew who it was by the shape of his shoulders and the way he bent over the pony as he rode. Then I saw his face, and I stood still by the side of the road and waited for him. ‘Murder him! Murder him!’ whispered a voice in my ear. Whose voice was that? The devil’s voice.

“My stick was a thick heavy cudgel with a knob. I grasped it by the end and waited.

“He did not see me. He was looking straight before



him, thinking, I suppose, how he had done well to get his nephew out of the way—the nephew he had robbed and ruined. So, as he came up to me, I lifted my arm and struck him on the head once, crying, ‘Give me back my land, villain!’ But I do not know whether he heard me or saw me; for he fell to the ground without a word or a groan.

“He fell, I say, from his pony clean on to the ground, his feet slipping from the stirrups. And there he lay, on the broad of his back—dead.

“He was quite dead. His face was white and his heart had ceased to beat. I stood beside him for an hour, waiting to see if he would recover. I hoped he would, because it is a dreadful thing to think that you have murdered a man, even when you are still hot with rage. If he would only recover a little and sit up, I thought, I should be a happy man.

“But he did not. He lay quite still and cold.

“Then I began to think that if I were caught I should be hanged. Would they suspect me? Fortunately, no one had seen me take that road. I was certain of that, so far, and they thought I had gone to Bovey. I must go away as quickly as I could, and leave no trace or sign that would make them suspect me.

“Then I thought that if I were to rob him, people would be less inclined to think of me; because, though I might murder the man who had ruined me, they would never believe that I would rob him.

“I felt in his pockets. There was his watch; no, I would not touch his watch. There was some loose silver, which I left. There was a bag containing money. I know not how much, but it was a light bag. This I took. Also he had under his arm a good-sized tin box in a blue bag, such as lawyers carry. The box I knew would contain his papers, and his papers were his money. So I thought I would do as much mischief to his property as I could, and I took that box. Then I went away, leaving him there cold and dead, with his white cheeks and gray hair, and his eyes wide open. I felt sick when I looked at those eyes, because they reproached me. I reeled and staggered as I left him, carrying the box with me in its blue bag, and the little bag of money.

“I was not going to walk along the road. That would



have been a fool's act. I turned straight off and struck for the open moor, intending to cross Hamil Down, and so, by the way of Post Bridge, make for Tavistock and Plymouth. And I remembered a place where the box could be hidden away, a safe place, where no one would ever think of looking for it, so that everybody should go on believing that the old man had been robbed as well as murdered. This place was right over the down, and on the other side, but it was all on my way to Post Bridge.

"I climbed the hill then and walked across the top of Hamil Down. On the way I passed the Gray Wether Stone, and I thought I would hide the bag of money in a hole I knew of at the foot of it. Nobody would look for it there. Not twenty people in a year ever go near the Gray Wether. Then I walked down the hill on the other side and got to Grimspound, where I meant to hide the other bag with the box in it.

"Tell them, if you ever get away from this awful place, that the box lies on the side nearest Hamil, where three stones piled one above the other make a sort of little cave, where you might think to draw a badger, but which would never make any one suspect a hiding-place. The stones are in the corner, and are the first you come to on your way down. There I put the box, and then I walked away past Vitifer to Post Bridge, and then along the high-road to Two Bridges and Tavistock. But I did not stop in Tavistock. Perhaps there would be an alarm. So I went on walking all the way without stopping—except to sit down a bit—to Plymouth. There I got a newspaper, but I could read nothing of the murder. Then I took the train to Falmouth, and waited there for three days, and bought a newspaper every day—one would surely think that a murder in a quiet country place would be reported—but I could not find a single word about my murder.

"Then I was able to take passage on board a German ship bound for New York. I got to New York, and I stayed there till my money was all gone, which did not take long. There I made the acquaintance of some men, who told me to go with them, for they were going west. They were all, I found, men who had done something, and the police were anxious to take them. I never told them what I had done, but they knew it was something, and when they found out that I knew nothing about robbery and burglary,



and couldn't cheat at gambling and the like, they set it down that it must be murder. But they cared nothing, and I went along with them."

"Your confession, my friend," said the German, stopping at this point, "of what followed—the horse-stealing adventure, your own escape, and the untimely end of your companions; your honesty in California, and its interruption; your career as a bonnet or confederate; and your experience of a Californian prison—is all interesting, but I can not waste paper upon it. I return, therefore, to the material part of the confession. And with this I conclude."

"I desire to state that from the first night that I arrived in New York till now I have every night been visited by the ghost of the man I killed. My uncle stands beside the bed, whether it is in a bed in a crowded room, or on the ground in the open, or in a cabin at sea, or on the deck, whether I am drunk or sober, he always comes every night. His face is white, and the wound in his forehead is bleeding. 'Come back to England,' he says, 'and confess the crime.'

"I must go back, and give myself up to justice. I will make no more struggles against my fate. But because I am uncertain whether I shall live to get back, and because I know not how to escape from this island, I wish to have my confession written and signed, so that if I die the truth may be told."

Thus ended the paper.

"So," said the big German, "you acknowledge this to be your full and true confession?"

"I do."

"Sign it, then." He produced from his bag a pencil and gave it to the man, who signed, in a trembling hand, "David Leighan." Under the signature the German wrote, "Witnessed by me, Baron Sergius von Holsten." This done, he replaced the note-book in his wallet.

"The reason why I wanted you to sign the paper to-night," he said, "is that there seems as if there might be a chance of your getting away from the island."

"How?"

"Look out to sea."

They were almost at the extreme south point of the island—the maps call it Cape St. George, but what the islanders



call it has not yet been ascertained. In the west the shores of New Britain could be seen, because the sun was just sinking behind them; to the south and the east there was open sea.

“I can see nothing.”

“Look through my glass, then.”

“I can see a ship—a two-masted sailing ship.”

“She is in quest of blackbirds. She will probably send a boat ashore. Fortunately for you, the people are all gone off to fight. You will, therefore, if she does send a boat here, have a chance of getting away. If she sails north, and sends a boat ashore fifty miles or so further up the coast, that boat’s crew will be speared, and you will probably see portions of their arms and legs for some little time to come in the huts. Well, my friend”—for the man shuddered and trembled—“better their arms and legs than your own. Yet, see the strange decrees of fate. The men in the boat are very likely no worse than their neighbors. That is to say, they will have done nothing worse than the smaller sins freely forgiven by every tolerant person. They have drunk, fought, sworn, lied, and so forth. But they have not committed murder. Yet they will be speared; while you, thanks to my protection, have hitherto escaped, and may possibly get clean off the island. Yet consider what a sinner—what a sinner and a criminal—you have been. Now, my friend, the sun is about to set. In ten minutes it will be dark, and we have neither candles nor matches. Go to your bed and await the further commands of the Herr Ghost, your respectable uncle. On the eve of your departure, if you are to go to-morrow, he will probably be more peremptory and more terrifying than usual. Do not groan more loudly than you can help, because groans disturb neighbors. Such is the abominable selfishness of the repentant, that their remorse is as great a nuisance to their companions as their crime was an annoyance to their victims. Go to bed, David, and await the Herr Ghost.”

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## CHAPTER II.

### A JONAH COME ABOARD.

“THEN you think,” said the mate, looking about him with doubt, “that we shall do no business here?”



He was a young fellow of two-and-twenty or so, a frank and honest-looking sailor, though his business was that of a cunning kidnapper. Perhaps he had not been long enough at it for the profession to get itself stamped upon his forehead. He was armed with a revolver, ready to hand, and a cutlass hanging at his side. Behind him were four sailors, also armed, in readiness for an attack, for Polynesians are treacherous; and in the boat, pulled as near the shore as the shallow water allowed, were two more men, oars out and in their hands, guns at their side, ready to shove off in a moment. But there were no islanders in sight, only these two Europeans—one a tall man of nearly seven feet, dressed in fantastic imitation of the natives; and the other, apparently, an ordinary beach-comber, quite out of luck, ragged, dejected, and haggard. A little way off the land lay the schooner. Her business was to enlist, kidnap, procure, or secure, by any means in the power of the captain and the crew, as many natives as the ship would hold, and to bring them to North Queensland, where they would be hired out to the planters, exactly as the redemptioners were hired out, in the last century, in Maryland and Virginia, to work out their term of service, and, also exactly like the redemptioners, to find that term indefinitely prolonged by reason of debt for tobacco, clothes, rum, and all kinds of things. They would be privileged to cultivate sugar, coffee, and other tropical productions, and to witness, a long way off, the choicest blessings of civilization; they would also be allowed to cheer their souls with the hope of some day returning to their native islands, where these blessings have not yet penetrated, and where they would have to live out the remainder of their days in say-agery of that deplorable kind which enjoys perpetual sunshine and warmth, with plenty to eat, nothing to wear, and nothing to do. Warmth, food, and rest—for these as a bribe, what would not our people resign of their blessings? The clothes they wear? Well, it would be a good exchange indeed from their insufficient and ragged clothes in a cold climate to none at all in a place where none are wanted. To exchange the food they eat for the food of the South Sea Islander? Well—apart from roasted brother—it would certainly seem, at first, a change for the better. To exchange work—hard, horrible, unceasing work—for rest? Who would not?—oh! who would not? Free institutions



and socialist clubs for a country with no institutions at all? Why, why is there not an extensive emigration of the Indolent, the Unlucky, and the Out-of-Work for these Fortunate Islands?

"It is an unlucky voyage," said the mate, gazing earnestly at the two men before him, whose appearance and the contrast between them puzzled him. "Two months out and five weeks becalmed; no business done, and the skipper drunk all day long. Say, how did you come here?"

"For my part," said the German, "I am a naturalist. I make the coleoptera my special study. I have, I believe, enriched science with so many rare and previously unknown specimens, if I succeed in getting them to Europe, that my name will be certainly remembered in scientific history as one of those who have advanced knowledge. Can any man ask more?"

"Colly!—colly what?" asked the mate. "But never mind your Colly-what's-her-name. How the devil did you get such a rig, man?"

"I am a linguist," the Baron Sergius von Holsten went on to explain, "as well as a naturalist. I therefore learned the language before landing here, having found a native or two of New Ireland in the mission of the Duke of York Island. It is a great thing to know how to talk with these black children. I am also a surgeon and a physician, so that I can heal their wounds and their diseases when they get any. You see, further, that I am bigger than most men. I am also thorough. I adopted their dress, at least some of it"—he looked complacently at his toga of tapu-cloth—"and therefore being able to talk to them, to impress them with my stature, and to cure them, I landed among them without fear. When they came round me with their spears I shouted to them that I was a great magician, come to their help straight down from the sun. And as I know a little prestidigitation and conjuring, and am a bit of a ventriloquist, I am from time to time able to work a few of the simpler miracles; so that they readily believe me."

"How long are you going to stay here?"

"I know not; New Ireland is rich in new species; but I shall have to stop as soon as my means of collection and description come to an end. When that day comes I shall be glad to see a ship. But it will not be yet."



“They may kill you.”

“It is possible;” the baron shrugged his tall shoulders. “They are like little children. It may occur to one of them some day to find out what I should do and how I should look if he were to drive his spear into my back. We all run our little dangers, and must not allow them to stop our work.”

The mate looked doubtful.

“I am also an ethnologist, and I assure you, lieutenant, that the study of these people is of profound interest.”

“Have you no arms?”

“I have a revolver; but what is one revolver against the spears of a whole people? I have really no other weapon but my power of persuasion and my reputation for magic and sorcery. These will not fail me, unless, as I said before, one of them may be anxious to see how a god behaves and how he looks with a spear stuck through him.”

“And how do you live?”

“The people bring me food every day. If they did not, I should afflict them with horrible misfortunes, as they very well know. I should tell them that in three days such a one would be dead, and then it would be that man’s duty to go away and die in fulfilment of prophecy. I suppose his friends would never speak to him again if he refused to fulfill the words of the prophet, so great is their faith. They bring me the unripe cocoanut for its milk; there are fish of every kind in the sea, which they net and spear for me; there are kangaroo and cassowary on the hills, which they snare and trap for me; there are birds which they shoot for me; there are mangoes, bread-fruit, bananas, yams, sweet-potatoes, and taro. I assure you we feed very well. Don’t we, David?” He laid his hand on the other man’s shoulder. “We have also tobacco. There is, however—which you regret, David, don’t you?—no rum on the island.”

“Is your—your—chum also worshiped?” asked the mate, regarding David with an obvious decrease of interest.

“No; David is recognized as of inferior clay. This poor fellow was wrecked upon the island; he came ashore on a plank, the rest of the ship’s crew and passengers having given indigestion to the sharks. He is not happy here, and he would like you to take him off the island.”

“Yes,” said David, eagerly, but still in his slow way,



“anywhere, so that I can only get on my way to England.”

“He was just getting off his plank, and the people were preparing to receive him joyfully, warmly, and hospitably, after their fashion; that is to say, into their pots—they have a beautiful method of cooking, in a kind of sunken pot, which would greatly interest you if you were a captive and expecting your turn—when I fortunately arrived, and succeeded, by promising an eclipse if I was disobeyed, in saving him. The eclipse came in good time; but I had forgiven the people for their momentary mutiny, and I averted its power for evil. So long as David sticks close to me now he is safe. If he leaves me, his end is certain. But he is no use to me, and for certain reasons I should very much prefer that he was gone. Will you take him?”

“The ship doesn’t carry passengers,” said the mate; “besides—”

“He is harmless, and you can trust him not to make mischief. I will pay for him if you like.”

“What does he want to go home for?” asked the mate, doubtfully. Indeed, the appearance of the man did not warrant the belief that he would be welcomed by his friends.

“He has to pay a pilgrimage; he has to deliver a message before a magistrate, and to be subsequently elevated to a post of great distinction,” said the baron.

“Humph!” said the mate. “He looks as if he’d done something. Better keep in these latitudes, stranger, where no one asks and no one cares. But about his fare: who’s to pay for his passage and his grub, if we take him?”

“You will return some time to Queensland. Take or send this note.” He took his note-book, tore off half a leaf, and wrote a few words upon it. “Send this note to Messrs. Hengstenburg & Company, Sydney. Tell them where you got it, and they will give you £20 for it, and will thank you into the bargain for letting them know that, so far, the Baron Sergius von Holsten is safe. If there is any money left after paying for your passenger, give it to this poor devil. He is not such a bad devil, though he looks so miserable, unless he begins to confide in you. When he does that, lock him up in a cabin. Perhaps he has done something, as you say; what do we know? As for doing things,” he said, regarding his humble companion with the



utmost severity, "a man who is tempted to commit a crime ought always to remember that he will some day, in all probability, be wrecked on a desert island, an island of cannibals, in the company of one, and only one, other European, and that man greatly his superior; and he ought truly to resolve that under no temptations will he do anything which may make him a nuisance and a bore to that companion through the vehemence of his repentance."

David Leighan groaned. "Man," added the baron, sententiously, "does not live for himself alone; and he who rashly commits a crime may hereafter seriously interfere with the comfort of his brother man." David hung his head. "I forgive you, David. I have protected you from the natives' spears and their pots and carving-knives for six months, though it has cost me many foolish threats and vain curses. I have fed you and sheltered you. I have been rewarded by penitential groans and by outward tokens of fervent contrition. These have saddened my days, and have disturbed my slumbers. Groan henceforth into other ears. I forgive you, however, only on one condition, that you return no more. If you do, you shall be speared and potted without remorse. As for the document in my note-book—"

"I shall get to England before you," said David; "and when I get there I shall go at once to Challacombe or Moreton, and make a statement just like the one you have in your note-book. By the time you come to England I shall be—"

"Exactly," said the baron, smiling sweetly. "You will have been a public character. Well, to each man comes somehow his chance of greatness. I hope you may enjoy your reputation, David, though it may be short-lived."

The mate meantime was considering the note put into his hands. It was very short, and was a simple draft upon a merchant's house in Sydney—the shortest draft, I suppose, ever written, and on the smallest piece of paper.

"Messrs. Hengstenburg & Co., Sydney. Pay bearer £20. New Ireland. 1884. Baron Sergius von Holsten."

"I will take him," said the mate. "The captain is always drunk, so it is no use waiting to ask him. Most likely he will never know. I expect to be out another three or four months. He can come aboard with me. But, stranger," he said, persuasively, "can no business be



done? Are they open to reason?" He looked round at the forest and deserted huts. "Can we trade for a few natives, you and me, between us? Lord! if I could only see my way to persuade 'em to worship me, I'd—blessed if I wouldn't!—I would ship the whole island. There would be a fortune in it.}}

"They are open to no reason at all. In fact, if they were at this moment—nothing is more probable—to come down upon us unexpectedly, it would be a painful necessity for me—if I valued my reputation as a prophet—to order them to attack and spear both you and your crew; otherwise I should be considered a false prophet, and should pay the penalty in being myself speared, and put into these curious large sunken pots in which one lies so snug and warm. They are a blood-thirsty, ferocious race. In their cookery they are curious, as I have already informed you. They are wonderfully handy with their lances, and they move in large bodies. Those pop-guns of yours would knock over two or three, but would be of no avail to save your own lives. Therefore, I would advise that you get into your boat and aboard your ship with as little delay as possible."

The mate took his advice, and departed with his passenger.

"And now," said the Baron Sergius, "I am alone at last, and can enjoy myself without any of that fellow's groans. I never knew before how extremely disagreeable one single murder may make a man."

That evening the rescued man, David Leighan, sat on the deck with his friend the mate. They had a bottle of rum between them and a pannikin apiece. The island of New Ireland was now a black patch low down on the horizon, the night was clear, and the sky full of stars; there was a steady breeze, and the schooner was making her way easily and gently across the smooth water. David was off the island at last, and once more free to return to England; yet he did not look happier; on the contrary, the gloom upon his face was blacker than ever.

"The skipper," said the mate, "is drunk again. He's been drunk since we sailed out of port. Don't you never ship with a skipper that is drunk all day long. Once in a way—say of a Saturday night, when a man may expect it—there's no harm done; and not much when the fit takes



him now and then in an uncertain way, though it may put the men about more than a bit. Whereas, you see, the captain has got the owners' private instructions—those which they don't write down. He knows how far he may go with the natives, and where he's to draw the line. So that if he's always drunk, what is the mate to do? Either he may take the ship home again and report his own captain, in which case he makes enemies for life, and may never get a berth again, or he may fill his ship with goods in the easiest way they can be got, which I needn't tell you, mate, is a rough way. And when he gets back to port, what is to prevent some of his men from rounding on that, mate? Then all the blame falls on him, and he is prosecuted, because it will be shown on evidence that the captain was drunk all the time. Either way, therefore, the mate gets the worst of it. Sometimes I think it would be best for him to join the captain. Then the command would devolve upon the bo's'n, and how he'd get *his* goods everybody knows."

The officer was loquacious, and talked on about his trade and its difficulties, not at first observing that his companion took no interest in it.

"Seems as if you're sorry you've left the island," he said, presently, remarking a certain absence of sympathy.

"I wish I had stayed there," said David, with a groan. "There at least I was safe, except for the—the Thing at night; whereas if I get back to England, supposing I ever do—" Here he stopped.

"If you've done something, man, what the devil do you want to go back to England for?"

"Because I must. There's ropes pulling me back, and yet there's something that always stops me. I was going home from Brisbane, but the ship was wrecked. That is how I got on New Ireland. Before that I was traveling down to Melbourne to get a passage from there, but the train was smashed, and I had three months in hospital and spent all my money. I dare say something will happen to this ship. She'll run on a rock, or capsize, or something."

The mate made no reply for a little. He was superstitious, like all sailors. Just then the drunken captain began to sing at the top of his voice. It was a sound of ill omen. The mate shuddered, and took another sip of the rum.



"Man," he said, "I don't like it. If the crew had heard them words they'd have had you overboard in a minute. Don't tell me they wouldn't, because they would, and think nothing of it. This is a voyage where we want all the luck we can get; not to have our honest endeavors thwarted by such an unlucky devil as yourself. Well, I won't tell them. But keep a quiet tongue in your head. And now go below and turn in."

Later on, the mate was able to turn in for an hour. His passenger was sitting up in bed remonstrating with some invisible person.

"I am going home," he said, "as fast as I can go. Leave me in peace. I am going home, and I will confess everything."

The mate asked him what he was doing, but received no answer, for the man had fallen back upon the pillow and was fast asleep. He had been talking in his sleep.

"I'll put him ashore," said the mate, "at the first land we make where he won't be eaten by cannibals. I believe he's committed a murder."

The next day, and the next, and for many days, the vessel sailed among the islands of the Southern seas. But David grew daily more miserable and more despondent; his face looked more haggard, and his eyes became more hollow. He was dismal when sober, and despairing when drunk. The mate left him now altogether alone, and none of the ship's company, who regarded him with doubtful if not unfriendly eyes, spoke to him. So that he was able to revel in the luxury of repentance, and to taste beforehand, in imagination, the pleasures of the atonement which awaited him.

It proved a most unlucky voyage. They lost two men in an encounter with the natives; they had no success in trading; the captain continued to drink, and the mate wished devoutly that the cruise was finished, and the ship back in port, if only to have done with a voyage which he foresaw would continue as it had begun.

The end came unexpectedly.

One night the watch on deck were startled by a bright light in the captain's cabin. The light shot into a flame, and the flame leaped and ran along the sides of the cabin and caught in the deck and licked the timbers of the ship. The old schooner was as dry as tinder, and caught fire like



a piece of paper. In five minutes it became apparent that they must take to their boats. This they did, having just time to put in a little water and some provisions. As to the drunken man who had done the mischief, he came out of the burning cabin and danced and sung until the flames dragged him down.

In the fierce glare of the burning ship the mate looked at David reproachfully, implying that this misfortune was entirely due to his presence.

"Even now," he whispered, "I will not tell the men you have ruined the voyage, burned the ship, killed the captain, and may be will kill us as well. What have you done that we should be punished like this for taking you on board? Is it—is it murder?"

David nodded his head gloomily.

"Then," said the mate, "whatever happens to us, you'll get safe ashore. You won't be drowned, and you won't be starved."

Three weeks later there were only two survivors in that boat. The other men had all drunk sea-water, and so gone mad one after the other, and leaped overboard in their delirium. Only David Leighan was left with the mate, and they were lying one in the bow and one in the stern, as far apart as the boat would allow, and they were black in the face, gaunt, and hollow-eyed.

When they were picked up, the signs of life were so faint in them that the skipper, a humane person, took counsel with his mate whether it would not save the poor men trouble to drop them into the water at once. But in the end, as there was just the least and faintest pulse possible, he hoisted them aboard and laid them on the deck, with their heads propped up. Then, the ship having no doctor aboard, he began to administer whisky and rum in alternate spoonfuls, so that the dying men got so drunk that they could no longer die with any dignity. They therefore recovered, and sat up, gazing about them with rolling heads and vacuous eyes. Then they fell back, and went sound asleep for six hours. At the end of this time the misery of the long fasting began again with pangs intolerable. But the captain rose to the occasion. Pea-soup, also exhibited in spoonfuls, proved a specific. Next day they had boiled pork; and the day after, sea-pie. Now the man



who can eat sea-pie can eat anything. The two survivors of the unlucky schooner were once more well and hearty.

For the rest of the voyage the rescued mate kept aloof from the rescued passenger. He would not speak to him; he avoided that part of the ship where he happened to be. As for the latter, he found a place abaft near the helm, where he could sit upon a coil of rope, his head upon his knees. And there he remained, gloomy and silent.

There was trouble, too. First, the ship sprung a leak, and the pumps had to be worked. Next, there was a bad storm, and the mizzen-mast went by the board. Thirdly, a fire broke out, and was subdued with difficulty. However, the ship at last sighted land, and arrived, battered and shattered, at the port of Sydney.

When they landed, and not till then, the rescued mate spoke his mind.

First he went to the house of Hengstenburg & Co., where he presented the baron's draft, gave news of his safety, and touched the money. He then led his passenger to a drinking saloon, and entered into a serious conversation with him.

"As for this money," he said, "you wern't a passenger more than a few days, and I can't rightly charge you much. Take fifteen, and I'll take five. With fifteen pounds you can get home, which I take to be your desire, and give yourself up, which I take to be your duty." It will be understood that the unfortunate David, in the extremity of his starvation and remorse, had been talking.

"A Providence it is," said the mate, "that where so many honest fellows were took, I was spared, else you would never have had this money, and you wouldn't therefore have been able to give yourself up, and you would never have been hung. A clear Providence it is, and you must regard it as such, and remember it when they take you out comfortably with the chaplain and the rope."

David took the money, rolled it up in a rag, and placed it in his pocket, but said nothing.

"I don't want," continued the mate, "to hurt your feelings, but if you could go home on a raft by yourself, or, being a Jonah—"

"What is a Jonah?"

"—Being a Jonah in a whale's belly, it would be kind and considerate, and might save many valuable lives. As



for me, I don't mind owning up that if I was to find myself aboard with you again, after all I've gone through, and you carrying about wherever you go an infernal invisible ghost, and talking and confessing to him every night—I say, if I was to find myself aboard with you again, I'd get into the dingy and row ashore by myself; I would, if it was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean."

David groaned.

Then the mate moralized upon the situation. Strange to say, he took something of the line previously taken by Baron Sergius.

"One fine ship wrecked, and all her crew, for aught I know, cast away; another tight schooner burned, and the captain and all the crew killed, except you and me; and a third ship half-burned, and brought water-logged into port—and all along of you! Blow me! if you'd knifed a bishop there couldn't have been more fuss made. I won't reproach you, my lad, because you've got your ghost to do that every night, and because you've got to face the racket of the chaplain and the rope and the long drop; but considering the mischief you've done, I wish to put it to you that what you've done was a beastly and a selfish thing to do."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE FIRST DREAM.

AT half past four exactly Mr. Leighan, of Gratnor, commonly called Daniel Leighan, or Old Dan, or Mr. Daniel, according to the social position of those who spoke of him, awoke with a start from his afternoon nap. Mr. Leighan always took his dinner at one; after his dinner he took a tumbler of brandy and water, hot, with two lumps of sugar and a slice of lemon—as his grandfather had done before him, only that the ancestral drink was rum, and the brew was called "punch." With the glass of brandy and water he took a pipe of tobacco. This brought him, regularly and exactly, to half past two. He then knocked out the ashes, laid down his pipe, pulled his silk handkerchief over his head—which kept off the draught in winter and flies in summer—and went to sleep till half past four, when he woke up and had his tea. This was his way of spending the afternoon. He had never varied that way, even when



he was a young man and active; and now he would never attempt to vary it, for he was old and paralyzed; and he passed his days wholly sitting in a high-backed arm-chair, with pillows and cushions at the back and sides, and a stool for his feet. From eight in the morning until nine in the evening he lived in that chair and in that room. There was always a wood-fire burning in the grate, even on such a hot summer day as this; for Challacombe is a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and the clouds roll up the valleys of the Teign and the Bovey from the sea, or they roll down from the Tors and the Downs and envelop it, so that half the year one lives in cloud. This makes it a damp and trying air, so that the domestic hearth at Challacombe is like the altar of Vesta, being never quenched, even in July and August.

Old Dan—we all belong, I am sure, to the upper circles, and can therefore permit ourselves this familiarity—was now white-haired, and advanced in years, but not so old as he looked by a good many years. His locks were long, but, though certainly impressive, they did not, as in another and a famous historical case, cause him therefore to look benevolent. Perhaps this was because he wore a black skull-cap—a thing which, like a beretta, generally causes its wearer to appear bereft of all charity, meekness, tenderness, and brotherly love. A black skull-cap is even said to have a really malignant influence as regards these virtues. Perhaps, however, no artifice or invention of science could make that face look benevolent. In youth, before its features were sharpened and stiffened, it must have been a singularly handsome and striking face. It was now a masterful and self-willed face. The nose was long and hooked, the forehead high and narrow, the chin sharp, and the mouth square; any one of these points may indicate self-will, but taken all together, they bawl it aloud. If his eyes were open, as they will be in a moment, you would say that they must have been beautiful in youth, when their bright blue was set off by the brown hair; now, after seventy years of greed and avarice, they were hard and keen, but as bright as ever—even brighter than in youth, because they were set off by thick white eyebrows like a pent-house. Before his affliction fell upon him he was taller than the generality of men. Even now, when he sat upright in his chair, he produced the same impression of



great height which he had formerly been used to exercise when he stood half a foot or so above any man with whom he was conversing. Great stature, properly used, is a wonderful help to personal influence. Too often, however, it is, considered as a means of self-advancement, a gift clean thrown away. It was not, in short, a common face which one looked at in that chair, nor a common figure. Any candid person—that is to say, any man who had never had business relations with Mr. Leighan, and might therefore be reasonably free from the vindictiveness and rage which blinded the eyes of his tenants, debtors, and dependents—would allow this to be the face of a man originally intended by nature to make a mark in the great world, if he should get the chance. He never did get that chance, and his abilities had been expended in the interesting and absorbing though petty business of overreaching neighbors not so clever as himself, extorting the uttermost farthing, and adding bit by bit to his property. He was now the rich man of a parish in which there was no squire; he was the village miser; he was the terror of those who owed him money; he was the driver of the hardest bargains; he was the strong and masterful man; he was the scourge of the weak and thriftless; he was the tyrant of the village. He knew all this, and so far from being humiliated, he enjoyed the position; he exulted in the consciousness of his own unpopularity; he alone in the parish had risen among his fellows to the proud distinction of being universally detested. Men like Daniel Leighan love the power which such a position means; they even think of themselves complacently as wolves lying in ambush to rush upon the unwary, and to rend and devour the feeble.

The girl who sat working at the open window was his niece, Mary Nethercote. That is to say, the work lay in her lap, but her hands were idle, and her eyes were far away from the sewing. She lived with Daniel, and took care of him. He railed at all the world except her; he quarreled with all the world except his niece; and those persons who averred that he was kind to her because he had the keeping of her money and took all the interest for himself, and had her services as housekeeper for nothing, were perhaps only imperfectly acquainted with the old man's motives and his feelings. Yet the statement was true. He did have the keeping of her money—a good lump



of money; and he did give himself the interest in return for her board and lodging; and he did have her services as housekeeper for nothing.

I declare that when one considers such a girl as Mary Nethercote, and thinks how helpful she is, how unselfish, how ready at all times to spend and be spent in the service of others, how full she is of the old-fashioned learning which fills the homestead with the happiness of material comfort, how little she thinks about herself, how simple she is in her tastes, and yet how sweet and dainty and lovely to look upon, one is carried away with gratitude and admiration. What, one asks at such a moment, is the wisdom of Girton and Newnham compared with the wisdom of the farmer's daughter? What, in fact, can the Girton girl make? Doth she solace the world and profit her kind by her triple integrals? Doth she advance mankind by her cherished political economy? Mary, for her part, keeps the fowls and ducks; Mary considers the fattening of the geese and the welfare of the turkeys; Mary looks after the dairy; Mary superintends the baking of the wholesome and sweet home-made bread under the red pots; the confecting of puddings, pies, tarts, and cakes; the boiling and skimming and potting of the most beautiful jams and jellies; Mary conducts the garden, both that of flowers and that of vegetables—there is, in fact, only one garden, and the flowers flourish in the borders beside the onions and the pease; Mary directs the brewing of the cider; Mary keeps the keys, and “gives out” the linen; Mary inspects the washing and the ironing; in short, Mary “openeth her mouth with wisdom and looketh well to the ways of her household.” She is up at five in summer and at six in winter; all the morning she is at work with her maids; in the afternoon she takes her needle and sews; in the evening she plays and sings a little to keep her uncle in good temper, and sometimes reads a novel for an hour before she goes to bed. This is her life. Sometimes there may be a tea-drinking. Sometimes she will mount her pony and ride over to Newton-Abbot, to Moreton-Hampstead, or to Ashburton, where the shop-people all know her, and are pleased to see her. But mostly from week to week she stays at home. As for a summer holiday, that is a thing which has never entered into her mind. The girl-graduate perhaps scorns the work of the household. I for my part do not



scorn the work of the farmer, whose work exactly corresponds to that of Mary. It seems to me a better and a happier life, in and out of house and barn, and linney, and dairy, in the open air, warmed by the sun, beaten by every wind that blows, breathing the sweet smells of newly turned earth, of hedge and ditch, and the wild flowers, than any that can be found in the study and at the desk.

The maids of Devon are, we know, fair to outward view as other maidens are, and perhaps fairer than most; though in so delicate a matter as beauty comparisons are horrid. Some there are with black hair and black eyes. These must be descended from the ancient Cornish stock, and are cousins of those who still speak the Celtic tongue across the Channel. But there is talk of the Spanish prisoners who had no desire to go home again, but settled in Devon and Cornwall, and became Protestants, in a land where there was no Inquisition. Others there are who have brown hair and blue eyes. Mary came of this stock. Her eyes, like her uncle's, were blue; but they were of a deeper blue; and they were soft, while his were hard. Her hair was a rich warm brown, and there was a lot of it. When all is said, can there be a better color for hair and eyes? As for her face, I do not claim, as the Americans say, for Mary that she was a stately and statuesque beauty; nor had she least touch of style and fashion—how should she have? But for sweetness, and the simple beauty of regular features, rosy lips, bright eyes, and healthy cheek, lighted up with the sunshine of love and truth, and colored with the bloom of youth, there are few damsels indeed who can compare with Mary Nethercote, of Gratnor Farm. As for her figure, it was tall and well-proportioned—full of health, and yet not buxom. Need one say more? Such was Mary in the summer of the year 1886: nay, such she is now, as you may see in Challacombe Church, where she still sits in her old place with the choir, beside George Sidcote. Many things—of which I am the historian—have happened since the summer of last year; but Mary's place in church is not changed, nor has the bloom of her beauty left her cheek; many things, as you shall learn, with many surprises and great changes. Yet methinks her face is happier and more full of sunshine now than it was twelve months ago.

The room in which she sat was low and long; it was an old-fashioned wainscoted room, rather dark, because it was



lighted by one window only, and because a great branch of white roses was hanging over the window, broken from its fastenings by the wind, or by the weight of its flowers. It had a south aspect, which in winter made it warm. Its chief article of furniture, because it was always in one place, and took up so much room, was Mr. Leighan's arm-chair, which stood so that his back was turned to the light. This prevented him from looking out of the window, but it enabled him to read and write and pore over his papers. The best scenery in the eyes of Mr. Leighan was the sight of a mortgage or a deed of conveyance. As for the sunshine outside—the flowers, and the view of hill and vale and wood—he cared naught for these things. There were, besides, two or three ordinary chairs—Mary had never enjoyed the luxury of an easy-chair or a sofa—there was a small work-table for her “things,” and there was a really splendid old cabinet, black with age, wonderful with carvings, for which Wardour Street would sigh in vain; in fact, the reputation of that cabinet had gone abroad, and overtures had been made again and again for its purchase. And the contents! Your heart would sink with the sickness of longing only to look upon them. There were old brass candlesticks, old silver candlesticks, brass and silver snuffers and snuffer-trays; silver cups of every size, from the little christening-cup to the great silver whistle-cup holding a quart and a half; there were punch-bowls and ladles; and there was old china—yea, china which would move a collector to sighs and sobs of envy. These things represented many generations of Leighans, who had been settled in Challacombe since that parish began to exist. It is now five hundred years since their ancestors moved up from the lowlands to the hill-sides and coombes on the fringe of the moor. It was about the time when the Yorkists and Lancastrians were chopping and hacking at one another—though no report of the battles came up here for many a month after the event—that the church was built. Civil wars, indeed, never caused any broils at Challacombe. The Reformation found the people obedient; Queen Mary burned none of them, for they were easily reconverted, and Queen Bess found them docile to the royal supremacy. The only enthusiasm they were ever known to show was a hundred years after Queen Bess's time, when King Monmouth rode across the west country to try his fate at Sedgemoor.



One of the younger Leighans, a hot-blood, who heard of his landing when at Ashburton on market-day, so far forgot the family traditions as to gallop over to Torquay and shout for the new king, and rode in his train, and did his share of the fighting. More lucky than his companions, he found his way home, and went on farming—'twas John Leighan, of Foxworthy—as if nothing had happened, and nobody afterward troubled him. In this great cabinet were kept the treasures of all those generations, about fifteen in number, who now lie—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters—in the green church-yard of Challacombe. Daniel Leighan, the owner of the cabinet, thought himself a warm man, but his warmth, in his own mind, consisted of his fields and his investments; he little knew or suspected how valuable were those treasures in his cabinet.

There were pictures on the walls—colored engravings and mezzotints of the last century. I take it that art, in the form of pictures, did not reach the Devonshire farm earlier than the year 1750 or thereabouts. On the mantel-shelf were certain china vases which caused anguish to the critical soul: they dated from the year 1820, I think. Above the vases were old-fashioned samplers in frames, things which made one babble of Mme. Barbauld, Mrs. Trimmer, and Joanna Baillie. I don't know why, because I never saw any of Mrs. Barbauld's samplers, or those of the other ladies.

A piano stood at the wall, laden with songs and music—not, I fear, of the highest classical kind, for Mary's school at Newton-Abbot, where she had spent two long years, knew little of classical music. Will Nethercote—I who wrote this story am that Will—sent her the songs from London, and George Sidcote bought her the music at Newton or at Teignmouth. There was also a shelf of books; but these were even less successful, from the classical point of view, than the music; for they consisted of novels, also given by this London person, and of pretty books bought for her in her boyish days by George Sidcote, and if we just hint that the leading bookseller of Bovey is apparently—to judge by the works laid out upon his shelves—under the influence of two young men who wear broad hats and flopping skirts, and talk loud as they walk in the streets, and profess a longing to restore church discipline, you will understand how satisfying to the imagination these books



were. Mary reproached herself for liking the works of Mrs. Oliphant, Thomas Hardy, and Wilkie Collins—those quite mundane persons—better than these gaudy volumes.

She was dressed for the afternoon in a pink chintz, with a pink-and-white-flowered apron, of the kind which covers the whole front of the dress; round her neck she had a white lace ruffle. All the morning she had been at work about the house and the poultry-yard, yet now she looked as if she had not done a stroke of hard work all day, so cool, so quiet, and so dainty was she to look upon. Her hands—not, to be sure, so white and so small as those of a countess—were brown, but not coarse; and her face, though she was out in all weathers, was not burned or freckled. Yet in her eyes there was a world of trouble. She was troubled for others, not for herself; she was suffering, as some women suffer all their lives, from the dangers which hung over and threatened her lover. You will find out presently that these were very real and terrible dangers, and that his life, and therefore hers, was menaced with shipwreck, imminent and unavoidable.

Daniel Leighan awoke at half past four. Generally the waking from an afternoon nap is a gentle and a gradual process: first a roll of the head, then a half-opening of the eyes, next a movement of the feet and hands, before full life and consciousness return. This afternoon Daniel Leighan, who had been sleeping quite peacefully and restfully, awoke suddenly with a cry, and sat upright in his chair, clutching the arms, his eyes rolling in horror and amazement.

“Mary,” he cried, and then the horror passed out of his face, and his eyes expressed wonder and bewilderment only.

The girl, who was sitting at the window, work in hand, was at his side in a moment.

“Mary,” he gasped and panted, and his words came painfully, “I saw him; I saw him—the man who robbed me. I saw him plain—and I have forgotten—I have forgotten! It was—oh, I knew just now—I have forgotten, Mary!”

“Patience, uncle, patience.” Mary patted and smoothed the pillows into their places. “Another time you will remember; you are sure to remember, if the dream only comes again. Lie down again and think.”

He obeyed, and she covered his head again with his silk



handkerchief, which sometimes soothes into slumber, if the silk is soft enough. He had started from his sleep, as if stung into wakefulness by the recollection of something horrible and painful; and his dream had vanished from his memory, leaving not a trace behind. With such trouble did King Nebuchadnezzar awake, to find his dream unintelligible. But the terror was left, and the foreboding. Mary saw the terror, but she knew nothing of the foreboding. Yet her uncle's mind was filled with anxious fears springing out of this vision. She saw the rolling eyes, the clutching of the chair arms, and the look of bewilderment; but she only thought her uncle was startled, like a child, in his sleep, and crying out, like a child, for help when there was no danger. He lay still for a few moments while she stood beside him and watched. Then he tore off the handkerchief and sat up again.

"It is quite gone," he said, in despair. "I have lost the clew. Yet I saw him—oh, I saw him, clear and distinct!—the man who robbed me. And while I was going to cry out his name—just as I had his name upon my lips—I awoke and forget him."

"If it comes again," said Mary, incredulous in spite of her words, "you will be sure to remember. Perhaps it will come again. Patience, uncle."

"Patience! when I had the clew? Patience! when I could follow up the robber, and tear my papers out of his hands? Patience!—don't be a fool, Mary!"

"Well, uncle, if it has gone, and you can't bring it back again, try to forget that it ever came; that is the wisest thing to do. You shall have your tea, and then you will feel better."

"Mary"—he turned to her piteously—"it is cruelly hard. Can't *you* remember? Think. Perhaps I talked in my sleep—some men do. Have you never heard me say anything—call some one by name? If I had only the least little clew, I should remember."

"Why, uncle, how should I remember?"

"It came back to me—all so clear—so clear and plain. And I have forgotten. Oh, Mary, my money! my money!"

"Yes, uncle. But it is six years ago, nearly, and you have done very well since. And it is not as if you had lost



all your money. Why, you have prospered while all the rest have been doing so badly. You must think of that."

"Lost all my money?" he repeated, testily; "of course I've not lost all. As if a man could bear to lose a single penny of the money that he has spent his life in saving. Do you know what I have lost, girl?" She knew very well, because he told her every day. "There were bonds and coupons in the bag to the sum of near upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year—nearly three thousand pounds they meant. As for the share certificates, they didn't matter; but coupons—coupons, Mary; do you hear—payable only to the bearer—a hundred and fifty pounds a year—a hundred and fifty pounds a year!—near three thousand pounds!" His voice rose to a shriek, and suddenly dropped again to a moan. "Three thousand pounds! Payable to the bearer, and I haven't got them to present! If I were a young man of thirty, I might recover the loss; but I am old now, and I can never hope to make it up—never hope to make it up again!"

It was six years since that loss had occurred; but this wail over the lost money was raised nearly every day, and almost in the same words, so that the girl felt little sympathy now with the bereavement of her uncle.

"It was six o'clock when I left Ashburton." The girl had also heard this story so often that her interest in the details had become numbed. "Six o'clock when I started to ride home. I had seventy pounds in gold upon me—fifty pounds in one bag and twenty in another; my tin box in a blue bag was round my neck, and it was filled with securities and bonds and share certificates. 'Better leave 'em here, Mr. Leighan,' said Fennell, the bank manager. I wish I had! I wish I had, Mary! But I was headstrong, and would have everything in my own strong-box under my own eye. So I refused, and rode off with them. At half past seven—it was dark then—I rode into Widdicombe. There I pulled up. I well remember that I stopped there, and had a glass of brandy and water. It was brandy and water hot; and they tried to make it weak, but I wouldn't be cheated. And then I rode on. I remember riding on. And then—then—" At this point he paused, because here his brain began to wander, and his memory played him tricks.

"At Widdicombe, uncle, you must have paid somebody



twenty pounds, and left your bag of papers; and now you can't remember who it was."

"No, child; no. I paid away no money at all in Widdicombe, except fourpence for the brandy and water. Why should I? There was nothing owing to anybody. Why should I leave a box full of securities and bonds in the hands of any one when I refused to leave them in the bank? Was I ever a fool-hardy person that I should trust anybody with property of that kind?"

"No," said Mary. "It is difficult to understand why you should do so."

"The landlady—she's a respectable widow woman, and it's only right that she should be near with her brandy—she bears me out. She remembers my paying the fourpence and riding away. After that I remember nothing. Why have I forgotten the ride through the lanes under Honey-bag? Why don't I remember passing through Hewed-stone Gate to the open down? Yet I remember nothing more. Mind you, I won't have it said in my hearing that I ever gave anybody anything, or that I left my bag lying about like a fool. Yet when George Sidcote picked me up the bag was gone, and twenty pounds had gone too—twenty pounds!"

"Well, but, uncle, consider: you had seventy pounds in gold in your purse and only twenty were taken. If it had been a thief he would surely have taken the whole, and your loose silver, as well as your watch and chain. Why, all those were left."

"I don't know. Perhaps he thought the bag of papers would satisfy him. How do I know? What made me fall off the pony? I never fell off the pony before. If I was Balaam I would make that old pony tell me who found me lying in the road and robbed me. Fell off the pony!—how in the world did I come to fall off the pony? I wasn't drunk, girl; nobody ever saw Daniel Leighan drunk. I wish I was Balaam—I wish I was—just for five minutes—to have a few words with the pony."

"You must have given the twenty pounds to somebody in Ashburton or Widdicombe, with the bag of papers. Everybody says so."

"I didn't, then! I felt the bag round my neck when I rode out of Widdicombe—the bag round my neck and the money in my pocket. Do you think I should not remem-



ber if I had paid away twenty pounds—twenty pounds!—do you think I shouldn't have taken a receipt, and the bill and the receipt both in my pocket? Twenty pounds—twenty pounds!—one would think the sovereigns grew in the hedge like the roses."

"Well, uncle, but think: every day you trouble your poor head about it, and nothing comes of it; why not try to forget the loss? Think what a prosperous man you have been all your life. Think what your property is now, though you began with only one farm: money in the bank and money invested and all; everybody talking about your good fortune. You should be thinking of what you have, not what you have lost."

"Go on; go on. Easy for a girl like you to talk. There's that difference with a woman that she only enjoys the spending; while the man"—he heaved a deep sigh, and did not complete the sentence. "Oh! Mary"—he reached out his long bony fingers and made as if he were raking in the gold—"to think—only to think!—of the pleasure I have had in making the money! It was little by little, not all at once. No, no; I saw my way, and I waited. I laid my plans, and I had patience. Be sure that not a field have I got but I worked and planned for it. The world is full of fools: weak men who have no business with property; men without grip, men who just hold on till somebody comes and gives 'em a shove off. Your cousin David was such a fool, Mary."

Mary said nothing. Her cousin David was doubtless a great fool, but people said unkind things about her uncle's conduct toward him.

"If I had not secured his property, some one else would. It is still in the family, which ought to be a great comfort to him, wherever he has gone. George Sidcote is another—well, he isn't exactly a fool, like David; but he doesn't get on—he doesn't get on. I fear very much—"

"Uncle, spare him!"

"Because he wants to marry you, child? Is that a reason for interfering with the course of business? When the pear is ripe, it will drop!—if not into my mouth, into some other man's. Business before love, Mary."

"If I could give him my fortune, he would be out of his difficulties."

"Your fortune, Mary? Where is it? What fortune?"



You have none unless you marry with my consent. Your fortune? Why, it depends upon me whether you ever get it. I don't say that I shall never consent. Show me the right man—not a spendthrift, Mary.”

“George is no spendthrift.”

“Nor a sporting and betting man.”

“George is not a sporting and betting man.”

“Nor a man in debt.”

“If George is in debt, it is not his fault.”

“A substantial man, and one who knows the worth of money: bring that man along, and we will see. If not—well, Mary, I am getting on for seventy, and I can't last forever, and perhaps—perhaps, I say—I shall leave you my money when I die. You can wait till then. Six thousand pounds is a tremendous great lump to part with, when a man is not obliged to part with it. And I am not obliged to give my consent. No, no; and after I've lost three thousand—three thousand! Besides, you're comfortable here: what do you want to marry for? what's the good of marrying? Better stay at home and save money. I give you your board and your lodging, Mary, while you are here, for nothing; and your clothing too—yes, your clothing.” He spoke as if many young people had to go without.

Mary interrupted with a little laugh.

“Yes, uncle, I know.” She laughed, thinking how much her uncle had given her for dress in the last year or two. Now since a girl may make up her own things, but can not very well make the chintz, cambric, and stuff itself, gossiping people often wondered how Mary managed to dress so well and prettily. Perhaps the fowls helped her, or the pigs.

“Well, uncle, but if I do marry without your consent you will have to give the money to my cousin David.”

“Yes, yes; of course. What's the good of telling me that? But David is dead, no doubt, by this time, and then the money must remain with me, of course”—the will did not say so. “But you won't do that, Mary; you'll never be so wicked as to do that. Besides, if you did, David's accounts with me have never been made up—that is, properly made up—and I don't doubt that when we come to look into them it will be found that he owes me a great deal still—a great deal of money still. I was very soft—foolishly soft—with David.”



Mary made no reply. Her uncle had been, indeed, soft with David: so soft that he had sold him up and turned him out, and now possessed his land.

Mr. Leighan sighed heavily, no doubt over his foolish softness, and became silent. It was not often that he talked so much with his niece.

Six years before this, about half past nine one evening in the autumn of the year 1880, George Sidcote, walking home, found Mr. Leighan lying in the middle of the road on Heytree Down. His pony was grazing quietly beside him, close to the road, and he was lying on his back senseless, with an ugly wound in his head, the scar of which would never leave him. He had fallen, apparently, from his pony, and as farmers do not generally get such ugly falls when they ride home at night, the general conclusion was that he must have been drunk to fall so heavily, and to fall upon his head. No suspicion of violence or robbery was entertained; first, because no one ever heard of violence at Challacombe, and secondly, because he had not apparently been robbed. So, at least, it seemed to those who carried him home, for his pockets were full of money, and his watch and chain had not been taken.

For three days and three nights Daniel Leighan lay speechless and senseless, and but for a faint pulse he seemed dead. When he recovered consciousness, the first questions he asked were concerning a certain tin box containing papers which he declared was hanging in a bag from his neck. Now of that tin box no one knew anything. Presently, when he counted his money, he swore that he was twenty pounds short.

I am sorry to say that no one believed him. That is to say, there was no doubt that he had taken that box from the bank, because the manager knew of it. But in his drunken fit—people were quite sure that he must have been drunk—he must have dropped the thing somewhere, or put it somewhere: it would be found some day. Time passed on, but that box was not found. And the loss, the inconvenience, and the trouble resulting from its loss were frightful. To begin with, there were coupons of municipal bonds and such securities, things only paid to bearer and never replaced if lost, representing investments to the amount of nearly three thousand pounds. The whole of this money, with its yearly interest, gone, unless the box



should be found—clean gone. Is it wonderful that Daniel Leighan went mad and tore his hair only to think of this terrible blow? Other papers there were, share certificates and so forth, which could be replaced by payment of a fee, but the coupons could not be replaced. Their payment could be stopped, but without presentation there was no payment possible.

Perhaps it was the agony of mind caused by this loss, perhaps the blow upon his head, which caused the paralysis of his legs. This affliction fell upon him a month or so after the accident. Then they put him in his chair beside his table, and propped him up with pillows, and he went abroad no more. But his brain was as clear as before, his will as strong, and his purpose as determined.

“Take your tea, uncle,” said Mary, “and try to think no more of your horrid dream.”

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## CHAPTER IV.

### CHALLACOMBE-BY-THE-MOOR.

THE village of Challacombe is known by sight to those excursionists from Teignmouth, Dawlish, or Torquay who take the train to Bovey Tracey, and then go up by the *char-à-bancs*—locally called “cherrybanks”—to Hey Tor and back; because on the way they pass through a little bit of Challacombe. It is also known to the people who take lodgings at Chagford for August, in the belief that they are going to be upon Dartmoor. Once during their stay it is considered necessary to drive over to Challacombe. They do this, and when they have arrived, they get out, stand upon the green, and gaze around. Then they either climb up the Tor, which rises just beyond the green, or they go to John Exon’s Inn for a cup of tea, or they get into the trap again and are driven away, under the impression that they have seen Challacombe. The village green, however, is not the parish of Challacombe. Again, there are two or three farm-houses scattered about in the great parish where lodgings can be procured, and those who take them for the season, if they are good walkers and do not mind roads which can not show one single level foot, or hot lanes which are deep and narrow, and run between high hedges of rose, blackberry, honeysuckle, and holly, which keep out the air



—after six or seven weeks of exploration and research, allow themselves rashly to boast that they know Challacombe. But no; after a second visit, or a third, they are fain to confess that, of all the places they have ever visited, Challacombe is the hardest to know, and takes the longest time to learn.

This being so, no one will expect me to describe the place. Besides, it is so far from the ordinary track, so remote from fashion, so little adapted for visitors, that it would be cruel to tempt strangers there. Let them be contented with a glimpse of the green from the cherrybank or the Chagford pony-carriage, just as the fashionable world which talks so much of art is contented with one single glimpse of the walls of the Royal Academy on the afternoon of the private view.

There is no village at Challacombe. There is a village green, and there is a church; on one side of the green is a long, low, picturesque old house with a porch, called Ivy Cottage, which was formerly the rectory; on another side are John Exon's Inn and Susan Wreford's village shop, which contains the post-office; on the third side are the walls of the rectory garden, the village schools, and the farm buildings of Hedge Barton; lanes and another small house make up the fourth side of the irregular quadrangle formed by the green. One or two primeval bowlders still stand upon the green, too deeply bedded to be removed, and Father Cummings's pigs, geese, and turkeys claim the right of running over it. Close to the green there was formerly a rude stone circle, one of the many on and around Dartmoor; but there was a rector— Must one sling stones at the Church? Yet this is lamentably true. Once there was a rector; pity that 'tis true. This good man—I say good, because I know nothing except this one sin to charge against him, and one may commit one sin in a life-time and yet be a good man—this rector, therefore, suffered himself to be annoyed because antiquaries came and examined this circle, sketched it, planned it, walked around it and across it, measured it, laid their heads together over it, shook their fingers about it, and wagged their chins at each other over it—would have photographed it, but Dame Science did not yet permit that art to be practiced—picnicked amid its stones, and brought with them their young friends—male and female they brought them, two by two—to look



at these mysterious stones, and hear them talk. The young friends—those who were not antiquaries—only said, “How deeply interesting!” and made the day, if it was fine, and the place, which is a very beautiful place, an occasion and a spot for the most delightful flirting. I think it was the flirting rather than the archæology which vexed his reverence, who had now grown old, poor dear, and could flirt with nobody any more, except his wife, and she was old too; not so old as her husband, but yet she wanted no more flirting. However, the rector became so seriously annoyed that, one day in the winter, when there were no antiquaries about, he sent to Bovey for two men and some blasting powder, and in a couple of days he had this rude stone monument blown into little pieces and carted away. Melancholy ghosts of Druids, it is said, come to scream upon the spot all midsummer night, in guise of owls; and for many years the enraged and baffled antiquaries came regularly once in the month of June, which is sacred to stone circles and to Druids, and on the site of the perished circle they performed a solemn service of commination upon that rector. They cursed him with the curses of Ernulphus; they cursed him out of the Psalms; they cursed him out of the Book of the Greater Excommunication; they cursed him after the manner of the ancient Briton, the mediæval Briton, and the modern Briton. Whether any of the curses took, as vaccination takes, I know not; certain it is that the rector is now no more, so that perhaps the commination killed him; perhaps, however, it only gave him tooth-ache.

The village of Challacombe-by-the-Moor, even with the advantages held out to it of a church, a green, a shop, and a public-house, refused to grow, or even to be born. This is odd. One reads of American cities with their church, their school, their hotel, and their weekly paper, but never of an American church, school, hotel, and weekly paper without a city. It is gratifying to be ahead of these pushing Americans even in so small a matter. Challacombe is a parish of farms and farm-houses, with a hamlet or two—such as Watercourt and Frellands. It stretches on the east from Watersmeet, where the Bovey and the Becky fall into each other's arms, to the outlying farm of Barracot-on-the-Moor; it goes beyond Hamil Down on the west; and it begins on the north at Foxworthy, in the valley of the Bovey,



and extends to the slopes of mighty Hey Tor on the south. Within these limits there is scenery of every kind except one: the fine champaign country which our forefathers loved so much is altogether wanting. Every field is on a slope, every lane runs up a hill, and every stream—there are four at least—goes plunging and tearing downward over its bed of bowlders and of gravel.

When Mary had given her uncle his tea, and cleared away the “things”—you will not think the worse of her when I tell you that she washed the cups and saucers—they were lovely cups and saucers, and almost priceless if Mary had but known—put them back upon the cabinet, and carried out the tray with her own hands—she left him to his papers and his pipe, took her hat and went into the porch, where she stood for a moment dangling her hat by its strings, shading her eyes with her hand, and taking a deep breath, as if to change the atmosphere of age, disease, and avarice in the parlor for the sweet fresh air of the mountains outside. The porch, which was covered with jasmine, now beginning to put forth its waxen blossoms, led into the garden, which in front of the house is only a narrow patch with a tall Norfolk pine. But at the side of the house it is a goodly garden planted with every kind of herb for the service and solace of man; stocked also with fruit trees, and having an orchard where the cider apples hang rosy red and golden yellow, yet sour enough to set the children’s teeth on edge even unto the fourth and fifth generation. Beyond the low garden hedge stretched a great pasture-field, known as Great Camus, Little Camus being its neighbor. It lay quite across the ridge, here broad, on which the house was built, and sloped over into the valley below, where the Becky ran down its narrow gorge, hastening to keep its appointment with the Bovey beyond Riddy Rock. It is a quiet little stream in summer, and generally the water is so clear that you might as well fish in your bath as hope to entice the trout; in the spring, however, you would have heard it babble up here as it ran from bowlder to bowlder, under alder and willow and filbert-tree, beneath the trailing arms of the bramble. You would have heard its roar as it leaped down the rocks of Becky Fall. Beyond the valley Mary gazed upon a huge lump of a hill, Blackdown, solid, round, and steep. In its side they have cut the new road; its line lies a clear and well-marked scar upon the green



slope, until it is hidden among the deep woods of Becky. Above these woods there rose and floated in the still air a thin wreath of smoke, just to show that among the trees were houses and human companionship. For my own part I love not those wild and savage scenes where no hut or wreath of smoke speaks of brother man. Robinson Crusoe was of the same opinion. Above the woods and beyond the hill, three miles and more away, rose the two great pyramids of Hey Tor, standing out against the clear blue sky, which had not yet assumed the haze of evening. Everywhere hills; to the right of Hey Tor, but lower down, the tumbled rocks of Hound Tor, looking like the ruined walls and shattered fragments of some great mediæval castle; lower still, Hayne Down, with its rocks thrown carelessly like coals from a shovel down its steep face. They were the playthings of some infant giant in the days gone by; he built houses out of them, and then kicked them over, just as a child builds his houses of wooden bricks and knocks them down. One of his toy structures still remains; a pile of stones one above the other, making a pillar thirty feet high, which men call Bowman's Nose. There had been rain in the morning; the clouds had passed away, though they were still clinging to the trees and rolling along the sides of the valley below, as often happens at Challacombe after rain; the air was so clear that you could see the rocks of Hey Tor as plainly as if you stood beside them, and every change of curve in light and shadow on Blackdown across the valley. The birds in July are mostly silent, yet at Challacombe their song never wholly ceases all the year round. From the trees behind the house there was heard the song of the thrush; a robin whistled from the garden-croft; from a neighboring hedge Mary heard the shrill screech of the wren; somewhere was a jay chattering in his harsh voice; somewhere was a dove cooing; the swifts screamed high in the air, thinking of their nests on top of the church tower; and the chiff-chaff sung the merry notes which delight him all the summer long.

Mary saw this scene, and heard these sounds every day of her life, yet she never tired of it; though she would have been unable to put into words the desire for the mountains which grows with the growth of those who live among them. Then, with a little flush upon her cheek and a brightening of her eye, she went out of the garden and to



the back of the house, where she knew George Sidcote waited to take her to the choir practice, for 'twas Saturday evening.

Most houses, even in the country, put their best side to the front. Gratnor kept its best side at the back. There is no view, to be sure; but there is a babbling little stream about two feet broad which runs merrily among miniature canyons and gullies; a leet is taken from this stream by a little wooden canal to the great water-wheel which stands more than half hidden in its dark and mysterious recess; the canal is leaky, and the water trickles forever melodiously upon the stones below. The place looks like a clearance in the forest; but an old clearance, not one of those where the stumps stand dotted about the field. Beyond the stream the ground rises steeply. This is the slope of Oddy Tor, by some called Nymphenhole and by others Viper Tor. It is clothed with thick woods, dark and impenetrable, which hide the moss-grown boulders on the top. A gate opens to a lane which leads to the Green through the hamlet of Watercourt, past the little chapel, where the people who go to church in the morning gather in the evening, to hear what they consider a purer gospel—though less respectable. It is “served” from Chagford, where I think that the illustrious Mr. Perrott could tell you something about it. There is something pathetic in the way that country people go contentedly to church, and listen to a gentleman and a scholar in the morning, and in the evening gather round one of their own folk, who speaks to them in the language they can understand, and out of the ideas which are in their own heads. The lane also passes the smithy, where Harry Rabjahns and his two 'prentices all day long blow the bellows and beat the anvil.

It was to the back of Gratnor that George Sidcote came to meet his sweetheart. He might have gone to the front had he chosen—the house was not closed to him—Daniel would have received him with such cordiality as he bestowed upon any. But it is not pleasant to call upon a man who refuses his consent to your marriage, and to whom you owe more money than you can pay. George therefore usually sat upon a tree—there were always the trunks of trees lying about—or, if it rained, took refuge in the linney, where he waited for Mary before they went together to the church to practice next day's hymns and chants.



## CHAPTER V.

## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

THE reason why farmers, gardeners, and cultivators of the soil generally are so fond of sitting down upon anything that offers, leaning against door-posts, hanging over gates, and in every way relieving the legs of their natural duties, is, I suppose, because they get up so early. If a man is crossing a meadow after rain, or a plowed field after a thaw, at six in the morning, he finds comfort on a wagon-shaft at seven in the evening. It is not because he stands so much, but because he is standing so early. Shop-girls do not want to be always sitting when the shop is closed; they would rather be dancing; and policemen off duty are said to take their rest standing, for aught I know, on one leg, like the secretary-bird. George Sidcote, on this July evening, had been up since five, and he waited for his sweetheart, a brier-root between his lips, sitting on the shaft of a wagon under the linney, where it was shady and cool. When Mary came through the garden gate he rose slowly, partly because he was a Devonshire man and partly because if a man is over six feet in stature he naturally takes longer to get upon his feet than one of the short-legged brotherhood, who are jointed with India-rubber. Then he laid his pipe down upon the wagon, took both her hands in his, bent over her and kissed her gravely on the forehead, as if to seal her once more for his own. There was little of the sweet love language between these two; they belonged to each other; they were so well assured of the fact that there was no need to renew their vows any more than between a couple who have been married a dozen years.

“George!” said Mary, softly.

“Mary!” George whispered.

Some maidens would like more of the passion and rapture which finds vent in passionate and rapturous words—such as those employed by all poets, and by novelists in that line of business. Very few young persons even of the most dazzling beauty get this passion and rapture, simply because their lovers, however capable in other respects, are



incapable of finding those words. Men therefore fall back upon the commonplaces of passion—mere “dear ducky” language—though their hearts be red hot, and though, in the language of the last century, they burn and melt and die. You may observe in the law reports, though many actions for breach of promise are tried, and many love-letters are read, the lover seldom indeed rises above the “dear ducky” level, except when he drops into verse, which is never original. George Sidcote, certainly, could not rise to these flights of articulated speech, nor would Mary have understood him had he made the attempt. She was satisfied to know that he was her lover. To have a lover or a sweetheart at all, my dear young ladies, ought to make you extremely proud, though never arrogant; and, really, to have such a comely lover as George Sidcote, yeoman, of Sidcote Farm, Challacombe, is perhaps the greatest gift that the fairies have in their power to bestow. As for his stature, it was over six feet; and as for his form, it was like Tom Bowling’s—one of the manliest beauty; but Tom had the advantage, denied to George, of setting off that beauty with a greased pigtail as thick as a club. His face was steadfast, his cheek ruddy, his eyes clear and honest; but, like Mary’s before her uncle had his dream, his eyes were troubled.

They sat down together on the wagon shaft, side by side, and George took up his pipe.

“I saw him this morning,” he said, slowly—Mary knew very well who was meant by “him”—“and I told him what I told you the other day, my dear.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that he knew it beforehand. He had calculated it all out on paper, and he was certain, he said, that this season would be the last. ‘Very well,’ he said, ‘the law provides a remedy when the interest or the principal can not be repaid. Of course,’ he added, ‘I am not going to lose my money.’ That is what he said first, Mary.”

“Oh! and what did he say next?”

“I told him that if he would give his consent, your fortune would nearly pay off the mortgage.”

“What did he say then?”

“Well, Mary, then we had a little row—not much. He said that it was clear I only wanted your money, and he should never give his consent. I said that it was clear he



meant to make any excuse to refuse his consent, in order to keep your money in his own hands."

"I am sorry, George," said Mary. "He told me nothing of this."

"It was not likely that he would tell you. He heard what I had to say in his dry way, and then asked me if there was anything more that I wished to say. Well, Mary, I was roused a bit by this, and I reminded him that, if you did not receive your aunt's fortune, David would be entitled to the money. Well, he was not the least put out. He only laughed—his laugh is the sort that makes other people cry—and said that you were a good girl, but silly, like most girls, and if you chose to throw away your fortune he was sorry for you, but he could not prevent it. Well, Mary, I came away. So that is done with; and this is the last year there will be one of the old stock in the old place."

"Courage, George," she said; "we will do something; we will go somewhere—somehow we will live and prosper yet."

"'Somewhere!'" he echoed, "and 'somehow!'" Well, I have a pair of hands and a pair of broad shoulders—yes. But you, Mary, and my mother?"

"Courage," she said again: "have faith, George. Even if we have to go away, we shall be together. I was reading yesterday a story about settlers in Canada. It had pictures. There was the wooden house, and the clearing, with the forest all round; I thought it might be ours. I read how they worked, this pair of settlers, and how they gradually got on, clearing more land and increasing their stock till they became rich in everything except money. I thought of ourselves, George; we shall not want money if we can live on a farm of our own somewhere, and if we can work for ourselves. You are so strong and brave: you do not mind hard work; and—and—let us have faith, George. God is good. If we must go from here, we will go with cheerful hearts, and leave my poor uncle to his lands and wealth."

Thus, when Adam and Eve went forth together from their paradise into the cold world, it was the woman who admonished and exhorted the man.

In these latter days it hath pleased Providence in wisdom to afflict the British farmer with bad seasons and low prices,



and the prospect of worse to follow; wherefore he will perhaps soon become a creature of the past, and the broad acres of Great Britain and Ireland will be turned into pheasant preserves and forest-land for the red-deer, let at fabulous prices to millionaires from the United States. As for the rustics, all except one in fifty will migrate to the towns, where they will seek for work and will find none, and then there will be riots and risings, with murders and robbery. What will happen after that I do not know, except that there will certainly be no recruits left for the British army; so that unless, as seems possible, other nations may be similar and similarly affected, our nation will presently go under, and be no more heard of, except in history; and some one will write "Britannia fuit" on a gigantic slab, and stick it up on the cliff at Dover for all the world to read.

George Sidcote's history may be guessed from his words. An inheritance of a small estate, a single farm, his own land, and the land that had been his forefathers'; the estate encumbered with a mortgage, which had become in these bad times harder to pay off than rent, because rent may be adjusted, but the five per cent. is like the law of the Medes and Persians. And the time had come when the struggle could no longer be maintained; the land would be taken from him. It is not wonderful if the young man looked sorrowful, and his countenance was heavy. "What does it mean?" George asked, in ever-increasing wonder. "Formerly there was nothing in the world so valuable as the land. If a man had money, he bought land; if a man wanted an investment, he put it out on mortgage. Is the land gone worthless? My father, Mary, was offered, if he would sell his land, three times the money that old Dan lent him on mortgage, and now it would not sell, at most, for more. What does it mean?"

Alas! This is a question which is asked daily, not only by farmers like George, but by deans and canons, rectors and vicars, colleges and schools, landlords and investors, widows and orphans, those who keep shops in country towns, the thousands who live by working for the farmers, the engineers and wheelwrights, the corn-factors and middle-men; nay, even by those who live by providing the pleasures of the rich—what does it mean? And are the fields of these islands to become as worthless as the slag that lies outside



the smelting-furnaces? Shade of Cobden, deign to listen! What does it mean?

"Oh, George," said Mary, "does it help us at all to ask that question?" Indeed, George was as importunate with this difficulty as her uncle was with his lost money. "Let us face the trouble, whatever it is. You will let me go with you—I will not be a drag upon you—if it is only to take care of mother for you."

He threw his arm round her neck and kissed her again—an unusual demonstration from him.

"You would put courage into a cur, Mary," he said. "There! I have done what I could, and I have told your uncle my mind. Let us talk of something else. Oh, I forgot to say that Will has come down. We shall find him waiting for us at the church."

"Will? I am glad."

"He got away a week before he expected."

"He will cheer you up, George."

"Yes; he talks as if nothing mattered much and everything was a game. The Londoners have that way, I suppose. It is not our way."

They left the linney and the little brook, and walked away through the narrow lanes, holding each other by the hand like two children, as they had always done since they were children together, and George, who was three years older, led little Mary by the hand to keep her from falling.

This Will—I do not mean the will and testament of Mary's aunt—that George spoke of with irreverence was none other than myself, the person who narrates this true history of country life for your amusement and instruction. I am sure, at least, that it is fuller of instruction than most of the leading articles that I am allowed to write. I am Will Nethercote, in fact; and though of the same surname as Mary, and a Devonshire man by birth and descent, am no relation to Mary. I once endeavored, it is true, to remedy this accident, and proposed to establish a very close relationship indeed with that dear girl, but I was too late. My father was the rector—you may see his monument in the church-yard—and when I left Oxford I found I had no vocation for the life of the country clergyman. Heavens! what a calm and holy life some men make of it! and how some do fret and worry because of its calmness and inactivity! Therefore I became a journalist. It is a



profession which suits me well, and I suppose if I live another forty years and arrive at seventy I shall have written nine thousand more leading articles, and my countrymen will then be saturated with wisdom. And when I retire, no one will ever know the name of the man who led them upward to those higher levels of knowledge and philosophy. I did not wait for these young people in the church-yard. I walked down the lane to meet them.

I declare that my heart leaped up only to see that sweet, fond girl walking with her lover, only to see the glow upon her cheeks and the soft light in her eyes. What says the foolish old song, "I'd crowns resign to call her mine"? Crowns, quotha! If I had earl's coronet, bishop's miter, royal crown, or even a tiara, I would resign it with the greatest alacrity for such a prize. Happy lover! though to win his bride he must take her penniless, while he has to give up his own broad lands! Well, she was not for me. Mary greeted me with her usual kindness, bearing no resentment on account of that proposition of mine above referred to.

"And how is George behaving, Mary? And has the Dragon relented?"

"George always behaves well," she said. "But as for the Dragon—" She shook her head.

"See, now, Mary," I said, "I mean to put the case before a lawyer. I will do it directly I go back. In the will—I went to Somerset House on purpose to see it—your aunt leaves you six thousand pounds, to be paid to you on the day that you marry with your uncle's consent. If you marry without his consent, it is to go to David. Well, David has gone away, no one knows where, and perhaps he is dead, or will never come back. Suppose you were to marry now without your uncle's consent, who is to have the money?"

"My uncle says it will be his own."

"We shall see to that. It is a case for a lawyer's advice. And I will get that advice directly I go back."

I did not consult a lawyer on the point, for a very good reason, as you shall hear. I suppose that as civilization advances such wills with conditions so absurd will cease to be made; or, if they are made, will be put into the hands of novelists for their purposes in treating of a world that has gone by. Girls who have money left to them will have it



handed over when they come of age, with perfect liberty to marry as they please. Certain it is, considering the great interest which we all take in each other's affairs, there will not be wanting plenty of friends to give advice and information as to the character, reputation and income of aspirants. I have sometimes thought that nobody ought, under any circumstances, to make any will at all, or after his death to do by his own provision and ordering any good or evil whatever. But I find this doctrine at present in advance of the world, and therefore it commands no favor.

"I am not back in Challacombe yet, Mary," I went on, because I knew the trouble that was before them and in their minds, and so I began to make talk. "This is only a dream. I am in Fleet Street. I am in the lobby of the House. I am writing a political leader at midnight, and just dreaming of Challacombe. It takes a week to get the streets and the papers out of my head—a whole week! what a curtailment and docking of a holiday! A whole week sliced out of a month! and then eleven months more of slavery! Man's life is not a vapor, Mary. I wish it was. Vapors don't grind at the mill every day."

I turned and walked toward the church with them, in the narrow lanes between the high hedges. The beauty of early summer was gone, but there are still flowers in plenty to make them beautiful in July and August. The honeysuckle was out; the blue scabious and the foxgloves are not yet gone; there are the pink centaury, the herb-robert, the red-robin, the campion, the meadow-sweet, the sheep's-bite, the ox-eyed daisies, the blackberry blossom, and the rowan berries—green or greenish-yellow as yet—old friends all, and friends of Mary's.

We talked of indifferent subjects, of what had happened since I last came down. One of the rustics was dead, another had nearly lost the use of his legs in the cold weather, and now hobbled on crutches—in these high lands rheumatism seizes on all the old and on many of the middle-aged, so that Moreton-Hampstead, the metropolis of the moor, seems on market-day like the native city of M. le Diable Boîteux; one or two village girls had been married; such a farm was still wanting a tenant, and so on. Pleasant to talk a little of the place where one was born, and of the people whom one has known from infancy; pleasant to be back once more among the hills and streams. But that



subject of which we were all thinking—George's impending ruin—lay like a lump of lead on our hearts. And so we walked through the darkening lanes, our faces to the west, so that Mary's glowed in the golden light like an angel face in a painted window, and presently came to the church.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CHOIR PRACTICE.

IN the church the choir were already assembled, and were waiting for them. 'They are so old-fashioned at Challacombe that they actually suffer the maidens to sing in the choir with the boys and the men. 'Tis a Christian custom, though forbidden by some modern ecclesiastics; and why women still consent to go to churches where their sex is continually insulted by exclusion from the choir, as if they were really the unclean creatures of the monkish mind, I know not. Some day, when they understand the thing and what it means, and what a deadly insult it is to Mother Eve and her daughters, there will be a revolt the like of which no Church has ever yet seen, and a schism compared with which all previous schisms will have been mere trifles. The choir of Challacombe consisted, therefore, of half a dozen boys and as many village maidens, with Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, for bass, and George Sidcote for tenor. There was a harmonium at the west end, and the choir sat in front of it. Formerly there were violins, a 'cello, and a clarionet; but these have fallen into disfavor of late years, and I know not where one may now go to hear the quaint old village church music, which had its points, of which a solemn and awe-inspiring droning and a mysterious rumbling were perhaps the chief.

As soon as we arrived, the practice began. They sung, right through, first the chants and then the hymns, both for morning and evening, so that the practice took an hour and more. The voices and the singing were as familiar to me as the rustling of the trees outside and the cackling of the geese upon the Green.

I sat in the porch and listened, watching the fading light in the windows, and the shadows falling along the aisles, while the voices of the choir, uplifted, rang out clear



and true, and echoed around the walls of the empty church, and beat about among the rafters of the roof. It is an old church and a venerable, though they have now taken away the ancient, crumbling, and worm-eaten pews, which were, I dare say, ugly, and yet gave character to the church. With the old pews disappeared certain memories and associations. You could no longer picture, because you could no longer gaze upon them, how, in the old days, Grandfather Derges went round, cane in hand, to chastise the boys in the middle of the sermon; he did not take them out into the church-yard and there administer his whacking, but he whacked them in the very pews. Grandfather Derges has now retired from his function as sexton, though he still breathes these upper airs, and hobbles along the lanes upon his sticks. Great-Uncle Sam Derges, however, still carries round the plate on Sunday. The old pews are gone, and with them also the memories of the yeomen who sat in them, each family in its own place, from generation to generation. As the yeomen too are gone, and only tenant-farmers left, perhaps it is as well that the pews have gone. Something, however, is left of the old church. They have not taken down the ancient rood-screen, with its painted apostles in faded colors, on which, in the old days, I was wont to gaze with wonder and curiosity what time my father mildly read his discourse, which everybody heard with attention and nobody heeded. Had the rector possessed the lungs of Peter the Hermit and the persuasion of Robert of Clairvaux, 'twould have been all the same, for the sermon to the rustic means nothing but a quarter of an hour of good behavior in the presence of his betters.

Presently it grew so dark that they lighted two or three candles on the harmonium, where they showed, amid the shadows of the aisles, like far-off glimmering stars. Among the voices I could clearly distinguish George's clear high tenor and Mary's soprano. They rose above the rest, and seemed to sing each for each alone, and to fit the music by themselves, as if they wanted nothing but each other, and could together make sweet music all their lives.

Outside, the clouds had come up again and were now rolled over all the sky, so that the evening was strangely dark for the time of year, and there was a rumbling of summer thunder among the hills and in the coombes, which echoed from side to side and ran down the valley slopes.



Then my thoughts left the choir and the singing, and wandered off to the subject which made them both so sad.

The situation was gloomy. How could I help, save to stand by and encourage to patience? George had already told me all. It was indeed what I fully expected to hear.

"I can no longer keep up the struggle," he said; "the land can not pay the interest on the mortgage, even if I live as poorly as a laborer and work as hard. I have seen Daniel Leighan, and I have told him that this year must be the last. When the harvest is in, he may foreclose if he pleases. It is hard, Will; is it not?"

"Is there no hope, George?"

"None. Either the interest must be paid or the principal. Else—else"—he paused and sighed—"else there will be no more Sidcotes left in Challacombe."

"But if he would consent—"

"He will never consent. He would have to part with Mary's money if he did consent. He means to keep it in his own hands. We are tight in the old man's grip. He will foreclose; then he will have Sidcote, as he got Berry Down and Foxworthy, and he will keep Mary's fortune."

"What will you do, George?"

"I shall emigrate to some place, if there is any place left where a man can till the land and live upon it. Will, is there some dreadful curse upon this country for our sins that the land can no longer be cultivated because it will not even keep the pair of hands which dig it and plow it?"

"I know nothing about our sins, old man: that department never furnishes the theme for a leader. But there are certain economic forces at work—which is the scientific way in which we put a thing when we don't see our way about—economic forces, George, by which the agricultural interests of the country are being ruined and its best blood is destroyed by being driven from the fields into the towns. Our sins may have been the cause; but I don't think so, George, or else you would have been spared. Now economic forces—confound them!—act on saint and sinner alike."

"I work like the farm-laborer that I am. There is nothing I do not try to save and spare; but it is in vain. The land will no longer bear the interest."

"What does Mary say?"



"She will go with me. Whatever happens, she will be happier with me than here—alone."

"Right, dear lad. Where should she be but with you?"

"We will marry without his consent. Then he will be unmolested in her fortune and my farm. I dare say there will be a hundred or two left after the smash. 'Poor girl!'—and I thought we should have been so happy in the old place. Poor Mary!"

Here was enough for a man to think about in the porch! What could I do? How could I help? Was there any hope of bending the will of a stubborn, avaricious old man by pleading and entreaty? Could I pay off the mortgage? Why, I had no more money than any young journalist just beginning to make an income may be expected to have. At the most, I might find a few hundreds to lend. But Challacombe without Mary! Sidcote without George!—then there would be no more beauty in the woods, no more sunshine on the slopes, no more gladness on the breezy tors! And the past came back to me—the past which always seems so tender and so full of joy: I saw again the two boys and the girl playing together, rambling over the downs, climbing together the granite rocks, reading together—always together. How could Challacombe continue to exist unless two out of those three remained together?

The black clouds hanging low made the evening so dark that outside the porch one could see nothing. But the lightning began to play about, and lit up the grave-stones with sudden gleams. Presently, looking out into the blackness, I discovered in one of these flashes a man in the church-yard walking about among the graves. This was a strange thing to see—a man walking among the graves after dark. I waited for the next flash of lightning. When it came, I saw the man quite clearly; he was bending over a head-stone and peering into it, as if trying to read the name of the person buried there. There is something uncanny about a man in a quiet village church-yard choosing a night darkened with thunder-clouds for the perusal of tombstones. One thinks of a certain one who lived among the tombs, and he was a demoniac.

Then the man left the grass, probably because he could no longer read any of the names, and began to walk along the gravel-walk toward the porch; perhaps because he saw the lights and heard the singing. You know how some-



times, when the air is full of electricity, one shivers and trembles and hears things as in a dream? Well, I seemed to recognize this man's footstep, though I could not tell to whom it belonged, and I shivered as if with prescience of coming trouble.

Whoever the man was, he stood at the entrance of the porch and looked about him in a hesitating, doubtful way. The choir were just beginning the last of their hymns:

"Lead, kindly light, amid the incircling gloom;  
Lead thou me on."

"That's the voice of George Sidcote," said the stranger aloud, and addressing himself, not me. "He always sung the tenor. I remember his voice well; and that's the voice of Mary Nethercote: I remember her voice, too. That's Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, singing bass: a very good bass he always sung. Ay; they are all there—they are all there."

"Who are you?" I asked. "Who are you to know all the people?"

A sudden flash of lightning showed me a ragged man with a great beard, whom I knew not by sight.

"I know you, too. I didn't see you at first. You are Will Nethercote." His voice was hoarse and husky. "You are the son of the rector. I remember you very well."

"I am; but the rector is dead; and who are you?"

"Before I go on," he said—"before I go on," he repeated these words as if they had some peculiar significance to him, "I thought I would come here first and see his grave—*his* grave—the place where they laid him; and I thought I would read what they wrote over him—how he died, you know—just out of curiosity, and for something to remember."

"Laid whom?" The man, then, was, like that other, doubtless a demoniac.

"I should like to think that I had seen—actually seen—his grave," he went on. "But the night has turned dark, and I can't read the names, and haven't got a match upon me. Will you tell me where they've laid him?"

"Laid whom, man? Who are you looking for?"

"I am looking for the head-stone of Daniel Leighan."

"Daniel Leighan?"



"Old Dan, they used to call him. Who died six years ago, or thereabouts."

"You mean Mr. Leighan of Gratnor?"

"The same, the same! I suppose Mary Nethercote got Gratnor when he died. They always said that he would leave her all he had, Gratnor Farm and Foxworthy and Berry Down. Oh, she'd be rich with all those lands."

"Who told you that Daniel Leighan was dead?"

"I saw it," he replied, hesitating—"I saw it in the papers. There was some talk about it at the time, I believe. A—a—a coroner's inquest, I was told; but I never heard the verdict. Perhaps you remember the verdict, Will Nethercote, and would kindly tell me? I am—yes—I am curious to hear what the verdict of the jury was—"

"You are strangely misinformed. Daniel Leighan is not dead."

"There is only one old Dan Leighan, and he is dead," returned the strange man.

"I tell you that old Dan Leighan is still living. He is paralyzed in his legs, if you call that dead; but if you have business with him you will find that he is very much alive, as much alive as you."

"Not dead?" The man reeled and caught at the pillars of the porch. "Not dead? Do you know what you are saying?"

"No more dead than you."

"Oh!" he groaned, "this is a trick you are playing. What do you play tricks for? He is dead and buried long since."

"I think you must be mad, whoever you are. I tell you that Daniel Leighan is alive, and now in his chair at home, where you may find him to-night if you please to look for him."

"Not dead! not dead!" By the frequent flashes of the lightning I had now made out that he was a very rough-looking man, in very ragged and tattered dress, looking like a laboring man but for his beard, which was much larger and fuller than an English laborer ever wears. "Not dead—can it be? Then I've had all the trouble for nothing—all the trouble for nothing. Not dead?" He kept on saying this over and over again, as if the wonder of the thing was altogether too much for him.

"What do you mean," I asked, "by your rubbish about



an inquest and a verdict? What inquest should there be? And what do you mean by saying that you saw it in the papers?"

"Not dead? Then how should his ghost walk if he is not dead? Are you sure that Daniel Leighan—Old Dan—is alive this day—the same Old Dan?"

"I suppose it is the same Old Dan. There has never been any other Old Dan that I know of."

"It can't be the same. It must be the devil."

"That is possible, and now you mention it, I think he may be, and very likely is, the devil. But I wouldn't say so openly if I were you."

"Not dead!"

He turned and walked slowly away. I heard him stepping over the stile, and then the sound of his footsteps ceased, as if he was walking over the village green, which, in fact, was the case.

The voices of the choir ceased; the candles were extinguished; and the singers came out. We two men walked home with Mary. There was no air in the lanes, the night was hot and sultry, and the lightning flashed incessantly. I told them on the way my little adventure with the strange man peering about among the tombs.

"It was like a bit of some old German story," I said. "I don't know why a German story, but when there is lightning with darkness, grave-stones and a mysterious figure, one thinks of Germany somehow. I thought he was the specter of some dead and gone villager come back in his old clothes—gone ragged, you know, in his wanderings about the other world—to take a walk round the churchyard among his friends; a strange thing to be prowling among the tombs to read the name of a man still living."

"Who could it be?" asked Mary.

"I thought I knew his footstep, but I did not know his voice. I can not tell who it was. He knew your voice, Mary; and yours, George; and Harry, the blacksmith's—Good heavens!"—for here my memory of the man came back suddenly with one of the lightning flashes—"good heavens! how did I come not to recognize him at once? Mary, it was!—how could I have forgotten? Why, the thing may change your whole future."

"Will, what do you mean?"

"Your whole future, Mary. Your uncle refuses his



consent because he thinks that David is dead: well, then, *David is alive!* For the man who prowled among the tombs and wanted to see your uncle's head stone was no other than David Leighan himself—come home again in rags.”

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## CHAPTER VII.

### WHO CAN HE BE?

THE inn upon Challacombe Green is a small place and a humble, though visitors who drive over from Chagford may get tea served in a neat and clean parlor, and those who find no solace in tea may refresh themselves with beer or cider. But let them not look for food, for there is no butcher or any shop of purveyor or provider within four miles. Yet, if a man should desire a bed he may find one here, clean and sweet, if he write for it beforehand; and meat as well to stay the inner man, provided the landlord has been warned in time to catch the butcher. The inn is licensed to Joseph Exon. It has no bar or tap-room; but Mrs. Exon receives her friends in a large, low room, which is at once the keeping-room, kitchen and drawing-room of the Exon family. It is also the smoking divan of the parish of Challacombe. The room is paved with stone, and furnished with a long wooden table and benches, a high-backed wooden settle to pull before the fire in cold weather, and a broad, hospitable fire-place. The kettle is always on the hob; overhead the black rafters are adorned with sides of bacon and strings of onions; the cider and the beer are fetched from a narrow closet or cellar at the end of the room. There are seldom many men in the place, except on Saturday night; and, as a rule, everybody is gone, the inn shut up, and the family are asleep in their beds by half past nine. It is, moreover, essentially a village inn, designed for the rustics of that village which has never existed; the farmers would not for instance, be seen sitting in its room in the evening, or at any other time; it is the club, the resort and the place of recreation for the laborers.

The room was about half full at nine o'clock this Saturday evening. Three or four men, strangers, who had come



up from Newton-Abbot on a road-making job, were drinking beer. The rest, laborers on the Challacombe farms, sat every man behind a tankard of cider—that sour brew which nips the throat, and somehow, though it is so sour and so weak, refreshes the hot hay-makers or the weary traveler better than any other drink ever invented. The fire was burning, although it was midsummer. The company sat about the room for the most part in silence; not because there was nothing to say, but because those who meet every night know very well that what they have to say everybody else has to say; speech, therefore, is needless. Had these rustics been Americans or colonials they would have played whist, poker, monte or euchre, also in silence; being Devonshire men, they sat and smoked their pipes, as their fathers and grandfathers had done in a friendly silence which was in itself restful; and they felt the convivial influences of repose and elbowship.

The latch was lifted, and an unknown person—a stranger—stood in the door, looking about the room. Strangers, in guise of tourists, are often seen on Challacombe Green in the day-time; they come over in traps of every description; but these strangers are dressed in tweeds or broadcloth. Such a stranger as he who stood in the door-way and looked around is rare indeed. Tramps and vagabonds never come to Challacombe; men really in search of work seldom, for they inquire first at Moreton or at Bovey, where it is well known that there is no work to be had in the parish except farm-work, and of hands there are more than enough in these bad times, so that the population of the parish is slowly decreasing.

Such a stranger, too! Devonshire rustics are not close followers of fashion to gird at a man because he goes in raiment rough-hewn. But there is a point where the honest garb of labor begins to become the contemptible rags and tatters of destitution. And there is a point at which the duds of the beggar seem ready to drop to pieces should Providence suffer a shower to fall upon them. Both these points had been reached—and passed—by the rags upon this man. He was clothed, in fact, in the same things, ragged and weather-stained, which he had worn all the way from Australia. Fancy undertaking a long voyage with no luggage at all—absolutely none, not even a hand-bag or a hat-box, or even a pocket-handkerchief full of things! A



voyage all the way from Sydney without a change! His flannel shirt was torn down the front, and exposed his chest; a dirty red cotton handkerchief was tied around his neck; a leather strap buckled round his waist seemed absolutely necessary to prevent that shirt from fluttering off in the breeze. His trousers were of the coarsest and commonest canvas, such as are worn in this country only for the roughest work, and put off when that is done; his hat was the same shapeless old felt which he had worn in the South Sea Islands, but now enriched with a hole, recently excavated, in the crown, which gave it an inexpressibly forlorn appearance. No one who had the least self-respect or the command of a single shilling would have worn such a hat; not the poorest tramp on the road, not the raggedest wretch on the queen's highway would so much as stoop to pick up such a thing. Not the lowest rag-and-bone man, or the meanest dealer in marine stores, would have offered a farthing for that hat.

His only respectable garment was an old sailor's jacket, worn and shabby, but yet respectable. It had been bestowed upon him by one of the hands when he came aboard with nothing but his flannel shirt.

David Leighan had money in his pocket—all that was left of his share of the baron's check. Yet he had worn these things so long that he had left off even thinking about them; they were ragged and shabby, but what was he who wore them? Besides, if you come all the way from Australia in obedience to an unfortunate ghost, who gives you no rest until you have consented to come, and all for the sole purpose of making confession and atonement, and giving yourself up to justice as a murderer; and if you expect to meet with the care and attention which are always lavished upon the personal comfort of a criminal in the interval between the day of humiliation and the day of elevation—why waste money on mere outward finery and fashionable display? Add to the tattered and torn garments of this remarkable man—the like of whom had never before been seen in Challacombe—an immense beard, long, not silky, as some beards are, but coarse and stiff, if not stubbly, and of a red hue rather than brown, which covered two feet or so of his chest, and was nearly as broad as his shoulders, and a mass of matted hair which had neither been cut nor combed for a longer time than



one likes to think of. Such as this, the new-comer stood at the open door and looked about the room as one who remembers it. But his face was seared, and his eyes seemed as if they saw nothing. Mrs. Exon, at sight of him, spoke up:

“Now, my man,” she said, “what do you want? We don’t encourage tramps here. You must go as far as Bovey to get a bed to-night.”

“I am not a tramp,” he replied, hoarsely. “I have got money. See.” He pulled out a handful of silver. “Let me come in, and give me a glass of brandy.”

He shut the door, and sat down at the lowest end of the table, taking off his hat and shaking his long hair off his forehead. Six years ago all the men in the room would have risen out of respect to the owner of Berry Down. Now not a soul remembered him.

Mrs. Exon gave him a tumbler with some brandy in it, and set a jug of cold water beside him. She looked at him curiously, being touched, perhaps, with some note of familiarity or recollection at the sight of his face and the sound of his voice. He drank off the brandy neat and set down the tumbler. What was the matter with the man? His eyes were full of trouble, and with a kind of trouble which the good woman had never seen before. Not pain of body or grief, but yet trouble. He dropped his head upon his chest and began to murmur aloud as if no one was in the place but himself.

“Not dead! he is not dead! How can that be? how can that be?” Then he lifted his head again, and gave back the glass to Mrs. Exon. “Bring me more brandy,” he said.

The landlady obeyed, and gave him a second tot of brandy in the tumbler, and again indicated the jug of cold water. The man had now begun to tremble in every limb; legs and arms and hands were shaking and trembling. His head shook; his shoulders shook; his lips moved. The guests in the room stared and wondered. Then he fixed his eyes upon the landlady’s, and gazed upon her as if she could read in them what ailed him. Bewilderment and amazement, which beat upon his soul, as the old poet said, as a madman beats upon a drum—this was the trouble which caused his eyes to have that terrifying glare and his limbs to shake and tremble. Not joy, or even relief, such as



might have been expected; these might come later, when the man who for six long years had been pursued by the fury of a murder-stained conscience should realize that he was, after all, no murderer save in intent. David Leighan's mind was naturally very slow to move. He could not at first understand how the whole long torture of conscience, the frightful dreams, the profound and hopeless misery of his exile, could go for nothing; why it had taken him years of suffering and the constant terror of a night phantom to persuade himself that the only way to escape the torture of his days and nights was to return to England and confess his crime. This once done, he felt certain that the nightly horror and the daily fearful looking for judgment would disappear, and he would go to the gallows with cheerfulness as a sharp but certain remedy of pangs intolerable. There are instances recorded—I know not with what truth—of murderers who have actually forgotten their crime, and gone about the world with hearts as light as before they did it. David was not one of these superior murderers. He had never for one moment forgotten the white face of his victim, and the staring eyes in which there was no light or life. He saw Death—Death with suddenness and violence—all day long, and dreamed of Death all the night. And now he could not understand that his dreams and his visions, his guilty fears and his contemplated confessions, were all vain imaginations, and might have been neglected. Therefore he sat trembling.

Mrs. Exon watched him, thinking he must have a fit of ague. He drank off the second glass of brandy neat, and set down the glass. Then his head dropped again, and he resumed his muttered broken words, still trembling violently.

“Not dead! he is not dead! How can that be? how can that be?” He lifted his head again. “Give me more brandy. Give me a great tumblerful of brandy.”

“The poor man is ill,” said Mrs. Exon. “Well, if brandy will stop the shivering—it’s a fever, likely, or an ague that he’s got—here, my man, drink this.” She gave him half a tumblerful, which he poured down.

The third dose had the effect of composing him a little. His legs ceased trembling, though still his hands shook.

“Yes,” he said, “I am ill. I was took sudden just



now. I am better now. Here's for your brandy, and thank you."

He sat up and took a long breath.

"Where may you have come from?" asked one of the men.

"I've come from Southampton, where I was put ashore. I've come all the way from Australia."

"And where might you be going to next?"

"I'll tell you that, my friend, as soon as I know." Ragged and rough as he looked, he spoke, somehow, as if he belonged to something better than would have been judged by his appearance. "If you had asked me this morning, I should have told you that I was going to Bovey; now I don't know."

Mrs. Exon still looked at him with the curiosity which comes of a half-uneasy recollection.

"Old Dan Leighan, now," he went on; "can any one give me news of him? I mean Old Dan; him as had Grattor first and Foxworthy afterward, and then got Berry Down, being a crafty old fox. Is he alive still? Somebody told me he was dead."

"Surely," replied Mrs. Exon; "he is alive and hearty, except for his legs, poor man."

"Oh, he's alive—alive and hearty? I thought, perhaps—somebody told me—that he died—I forget how—six years ago come October it was. That's what they told me: six years come October."

"He had an accident just about that time—six years ago. Perhaps that is what you are thinking of."

"How the devil," he asked, without taking any notice of this reply, "can a live man have a ghost? How can a live man send his own ghost to travel all round the world? Won't he want his own ghost for himself sometimes?"

"He's got a touch of fever," said the landlady, "and it has gone to his head. You had better go home, my man, and lie down, if you have got a bed anywhere."

"I want to know this," he repeated, earnestly; "did anybody ever hear of a living man sending his ghost out on errands, to keep people awake and threaten things? It can't be; it isn't in nature."

Nobody could explain this fact, which was new to all. Mrs. Exon shook her head as if the questioner, being light-headed, must be treated tenderly and one of the men re-



membered a village ghost story, which he began. Unfortunately for the Society of Psychical Research, that story was interrupted at its very commencement by this remarkable stranger.

"How did he do it, then?" he asked, impatiently, banging the table with his fist; "tell me that! How did he do it?" Then he pulled himself together and became natural again. "About his legs, now. What's the matter with Dan Leighan's legs?"

"Why, after his accident they began to fail him, and now he's paralyzed, and never leaves his room unless he's wheeled out of a fine morning. But hearty in appetite, and as for his head, it is as clear as ever, so they tell me. For my part, Joseph and me never had no doings with Mr. Leighan, and we don't want none."

"What was his accident?"

"He fell from his pony coming home at night. Some say he was in drink; but then he was always a sober man, and I don't believe he was in drink, though perhaps he may have had a fit; because how else could he fall at all, and how should he fall so hard, right upon his head? Mr. George Sidcote it was that found him lying in the road. He was insensible for three days. When he came to, he couldn't remember nor tell anybody how the accident happened; but he said he'd been robbed, though his pocket was full of money, and his watch and chain hadn't been taken. Papers they were, he said, that he was robbed of. But there's many thinks he must have put those papers somewhere, and forgotten because of the knock on his head."

"Oh!"—the stranger rubbed his hands. "I'm better now," he said; "I am much better. Out in Australia I caught a fever, and it gives me a shock now and again. Much better now. So—Old Dan Leighan fell from his pony—he had an accident, and he fell—from his pony—on his head—and was senseless for three days—and was robbed of papers? Now who could have robbed him of papers? Were they valuable papers?"

"Well, that I can not say. You've had your brandy, and it's an expensive drink for the likes of you, my man. You'd best pay for it and go. It's a good five mile to Bovey."

"Ay, I'll pay for it and go. He lost papers, and he was



insensible for three days, and he can't remember—ho! ho! He can't remember—ho! ho! ho!”

Did you ever see a man in an hysterical fit? It is pretty bad to look at a woman laughing and crying with uncontrolled and uncontrollable passion, but it is far worse to see a man. This strong, ragged man, seized with an hysterical fit, rolled about upon the bench, laughing and crying. Then he stood up to laugh, rolling his shoulders and crying at the same time, but his laugh was not mirthful, and his crying was a scream, and he staggered as he laughed. Then he steadied himself with one hand on the table; he caught at another man's shoulder with the other hand; and all the time, while the villagers looked on open-mouthed, he laughed and cried, and laughed again, without reason apparent, without restraint, without mirth, without grief, while the tears coursed down his cheeks. Some of the men held him by force; but they could not stop the strong sobbing or the hiccoughing laugh or the shaking of his limbs. At last, the fit spent, he lay back on the settle, propped against the corner, exhausted, but outwardly calm and composed again.

“Are you better now?” asked the landlady.

“I've been ill,” he said, “and something shook me. Seems as if I've had a kind of a fit, and talked foolish, likely. What did I say? what did I talk about?”

“You were asking after Mr. Leighan. Who are you? What do you want to know about Mr. Leighan? You asked after his health and his accident. And then you had a fit of hysterics. I never saw a man—nor a woman, neither—in such hysterics. You'd best go home and get to bed. Where are you going to sleep? Where are you going to?”

“Where's your husband, Mrs. Exon? Where's Joseph?” he asked, unexpectedly.

Mrs. Exon started and gasped. “Joseph's gone to Bovey with the cart. He ought to have been home an hour ago. But who are you?”

“William Shears”—he turned to one of the men—“you don't seem to remember me?”

“Why, no,” William replied with a jump, because it is terrifying to be recognized by a stranger who has fits and talks about live men's ghosts. “No; I can't rightly say I do.”



“Grandfather Derges”—he applied to the oldest inhabitant, who is generally found to have just outlived his memory, though if you had asked him a week or two ago he could have told the most wonderful things—“Grandfather Derges, don’t you remember me?”

“No, I don’t. Seems as if I be old enough to remember everybody. But my memory isn’t what it was. No, I don’t remember you. Yet I should say, now, as you might belong to these parts, because you seem to know my name.”

That did, indeed, seem a logical conclusion. Grandfather Derges therefore had not outlived his reasoning faculties. Why, of course the stranger might belong to these parts. How else could he know Joseph Exon and William Shears and Grandfather Derges?

“I remember you, grandfather, when you used to cane the boys in church.”

“Ay, ay,” said the old man. “So I did—so I did. Did I ever cane you, master? You must have a wonderful memory now, to remember that.”

“Don’t you remember me, William Clampit?” he asked a third man.

“No, I don’t,” replied William, shortly, as if he did not wish to tax his memory about a man so ragged.

Then they all gazed upon him with the earnestness of Mr. Pickwick’s turnkeys taking their prisoner’s portrait. Here was a man who knew them all, and none of them knew him. He had come from Lord knows where—he said Australia; he had talked the most wonderful stuff about dead people and live people; he had drunk neat brandy enough to make him drunk; and he had had a fit, such a fit as nobody had ever seen before. Now he was quiet and in his right senses, and he knew everybody in the room, except the strangers from Newton-Abbot.

“I’ve been away a good many years,” he said, “and I’ve come back pretty well as poor as when I left, and a sight more ragged. I didn’t think that a beard and rags would alter me so that nobody should know me. Why, Mrs. Exon, does a man leave the parish every week for Australia that I should be so soon forgotten?”

He did not speak in the least like one of themselves. His manner of speech was not refined, it is true; but there are *nuances*, so to speak, which differentiate the talk of the masters from the talk of the rustics. He spoke like one



of the masters. So in France, the *ouvrier* recognizes the *bourgeoise* by his speech, disguise him as you may.

"I have come back without anything except a little money in my pocket. Now, Mrs. Exon, give me some bread and cheese for supper; I've had no dinner. Being ill, you see, and shaken more than a bit, I didn't want my dinner. Then I'll have a pipe, and you shall tell me the news and all that has happened. Perhaps by that time you will find out who I am."

When he had eaten his bread and cheese, he called for more brandy, this time with water, and began to smoke, showing no trace at all of his late fit. He talked about the parish, and showed that he knew everybody in it; he asked who had married and who were dead; he inquired into the position and prospects of all the farms; he showed the most intimate acquaintance with everybody and the greatest interest in the affairs of all the families. Yet no one could remember who he was.

About half past nine the door was opened again. This time to admit Harry Rabjahns, the blacksmith, who had been finishing the choir practice with a little conversation, and was now thirsty.

He stepped in—a big, strong man, with broad shoulders and a brown beard. His eyes fell upon the stranger.

"Good Lord!" he cried, "it's Mr. David Leighan come back again, and him in rags!"

"So it is—it's Mr. David," cried Mrs. Exon, clapping her hands. "To think that none of us knew him at first sight! And that you should come to my house, of all the houses in the parish, first, and me not to know you!—oh, Mr. David!—me not to know you! and you in this condition! But you'll soon change all that; and I'll make up the bed for you—and your uncle and Miss Mary will be downright glad to see you. Mr. David! To think of my not knowing Mr. David!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A QUIET SUNDAY MORNING.

- I SUPPOSE there is no place in the world more quiet than Challacombe on Sunday morning. All the men, all the boys, and all the girls, with some of the wives, are at church; and none but those who have babies are left at



home. The very creatures in the meadows seem to know that it is Sunday, and lie restfully in their pastures. The quietest place in the whole parish I take to be Gratnor, because it lies off any of the lanes which lead to Moreton, Widdicombe, or Bovey Tracey. The farm occupies the Ridge, a name which applies to both summit and slopes of a long projecting spur which runs eastward, narrow and steep, between the valley of the Becky and the valley of the Bovey. Standing on Hayne Down, over against the Ridge one can see how the ground breaks down, with hill after hill, each lower than the other, until the Ridge itself abruptly falls into the lower Coombe at Riddy Rock, where the waters meet. First, there is Ease Down; then, Manaton Tor; next Latchell; and lastly Nymphenhole, or Oddy Tor, with Gratnor Farm beyond these Tors, its fields and meadows showing among the trees like a clearance in some great primeval forest. No path—save the narrow and winding Water Lane, which leads either to the clam across the Bovey, and so to Lustleigh Cleeve, or else to Horsham Steps, and so to Foxworthy and North Bovey—passes near Gratnor. It is quiet enough every day in the week; but then there are the sounds of labor, the ringing of the blacksmith's anvil, the wheels of a cart in the lane, the woodman's ax in the coppice, the voice of the plowman in the field—all the year round some voice or sound of work; but on Sunday there is nothing except the quiet clucking of the hens and the self-satisfied quomp of the ducks, and the song of the birds from the woods of Latchell and Nymphenhole.

I suppose that there was somebody left in the house—otherwise how should the Sunday roast and pudding be ready to time?—but when Mary had laid out the Bible and Prayer-book for her uncle to read the service of the day, with the weekly paper for him to take after the service, and had adjusted his cushions and left him, there was no sign or sound about the place of human creature. As for locking up houses or shutting doors for fear of thieves, Challacombe was like the realm of England under good King Alfred, when, as we know, gold crowns, and torquils, and bracelets, and the most precious carved horns used to be hung out to ornament the hedges by ostentatious Thanes, and the casual tramp only sighed when he saw them, and, at the worst, sinfully envied their possessor, and wished that



he had been born seven hundred years later, when he might have consigned them safely with the nearest "fence."

Mr. Leighan read the morning service—Litany, Lessons, Chants, Psalms, Commandments and the prayer for the Church militant here upon earth—quite through without omitting one single petition. He did this every Sunday as punctiliously as the captain of a Bombay liner. The claims and calls of religious duty satisfied, he lay back in his chair and gently closed his eyes, surrendering his whole mind to the blissful prospect of speedily foreclosing on Sidcote. The end of the year, he knew full well, and had made it all out clear on paper, would make an end of George, and put himself in as owner of that farm as well as all the others. Truly, in the matter of land, he was as insatiable as King Picrochole. So pleasing was the imaginary possession of these acres that he forgot the weekly newspaper, and continued to picture himself as the owner of Sidcote—alas! that he could no longer ride about the fields—until he dropped into a gentle slumber.

It was exactly twelve o'clock when he was suddenly startled by a man's step. He knew the step somehow, but could not at the moment remember to whom it belonged. The man, whoever he was, knew his way about the place, because he came from the back and walked straight, treading heavily, to the room where Mr. Leighan was sitting, and opened the door. It was David coming to call upon his uncle on his return. There was some improvement in his appearance. Joseph Exon had lent him certain garments in place of those he had worn the day before; the canvas trousers, for instance, had gone, and the terrible felt hat with the hole in the crown. His dress was now of a nondescript and incongruous kind, the sailor's jacket ill assorting with the rustic corduroy trousers and waistcoat. He had no collar, and the red handkerchief was gone; his beard and hair had been trimmed a bit, and he was washed. Yet in spite of his improved dress he preserved the air of one who belongs to the lower depths. It is quite terrible to observe with what alacrity most men sink. It is as if a lower level was natural for most of us. I saw the other day in a work-house a man who had been—is still, I suppose—a clergyman of the Church of England. They employed him in attending to the engine fires; he stoked with zeal—no doubt with far greater zeal than he had ever shown



in his pastoral duties—and he wore the work-house uniform as if he liked it and was at home in it. David, who had been a person of consideration and a gentleman, as gentlemen are reckoned at Challacombe, was now at his ease in the garb and appearance of a day-laborer. Had it not been for that specter which haunted him every night he would have been contented to end his days in Australia as a laborer paid by the job.

He threw open the door and stood confronting the man whom he had last seen dead, as he thought, killed by his own hand. He tried to face him brazenly, but broke down and stood before him with hanging head and guilty eyes.

“So,” said Daniel Leighan, “it is David come back again. We thought you were dead.”

“You hoped I was dead: say it out,” said David, with a ropy voice.

“Dead or alive, it makes no difference to me. Stay: you were in my debt when you went away. Have you come to settle that long-outstanding account?”

David stepped into the room and shut the door behind him.

“You have got something to say to me first,” he said, still in a ropy and husky voice. “Have it out now, and get it over. Something you’ve kept dark, eh?”

“What do you mean?”

“Outside they knew nothing about it. That was well done. No occasion to make a family scandal—and me gone away and all—was there? Come, let us have it out, old man. Who robbed me of my land?”

His words were defiant, but his eyes were uneasy and suspicious.

“Say, rather, who fooled away his inheritance with drink and neglect?”

“Robbed me, I say!”

“If I had not bought your land some one else would. If you’ve come home in this disposition, David, you had better go away again as soon as you please. Don’t waste my time with foolish talk.”

“‘David’s gone,’ you said. ‘When he comes back, we’ll have it out. We won’t have a family scandal.’ Well, I am back. I thought you were dead.”



"I am not dead, as you see."

"Well, go on. Say what you've got to say. I'll sit and listen. Come; I owe you so much. Pay it out, then."

"David," said his uncle, quietly, "drink has evidently driven you off your head. Family scandal? What was there to hide? Good heavens! do you suppose that the whole of your life, with its profligacy and drunkenness, was not known to all the country-side? Why, your history is one long scandal. Things to hide? Why, the whole parish was so ashamed of you that it rejoiced when you went away."

David heard this speech with a kind of stupefaction.

"Nephew David," his uncle went on, "you may be sure that it was not my interest, considering that your land became mine, to hide anything to your discredit. It is a censorious world, but the worst of them can't blame my conduct toward you."

It is indeed a censorious world, but it is remarkable how every man persuades himself that the fishiest of his doings can not be handled severely even by the most censorious of his fellows. In this matter of David, now, they said very cruel things indeed about Daniel's conduct; and it was not true that the parish rejoiced when David went away. Nor were they ashamed of him. Not at all; they knew him for a good-natured, easy-going young fellow, who gave freely when he had anything to give, drank freely, spent freely, and was only parsimonious in the matter of work; certainly he stinted himself in that particular, which made his uncle's crafty plans the easier to carry through.

"The law protected you, David, and you had the full benefit of law. When you borrowed the money of me, little by little, and when you gave me a mortgage on your land, the law stepped in to prevent any undue advantage. It protected you. What I did was by permission of the law. Your case was decided in a London court. I could not sell you up, and I was ordered to give you a term of six months, in which to pay principal or interest; failing that, I was permitted to foreclose without your having power of redemption. That is the law. You did not pay either interest or principal, and the land became mine. If you have any quarrel it is with the law of this land, not with me." Mr. Leighan made this statement in dry judicial tones which would have done credit to a Judge in Chancery.



"And that," he concluded, "is all I have to say to you, David. What are you staring like a stuck pig for?"

"Oh, Lord!" cried David, "is it possible? What does he mean? Come, old man, don't bottle up. You can't do anything to me now, and I might do a great deal for you; I might, if you didn't bottle up and bear malice. Come—you and me know—let's have it out."

"What do we two know? All I know is that you have been away for six years, that you come back in rags, that you had a fit of some kind last night up at Joseph Exon's, and that you drank brandy and water until you were well-nigh drunk. Have you got any account to give of yourself?"

"Don't bottle up," David said, feebly. "There's nobody here but you and me. I'll own up. And then I can help you as nobody else can—if you don't bottle up. If you do—but why should you? What's the good? There's nobody here but you and me. What the devil is the good of pretending that there's nothing? Did you ever forgive anybody in your life? Do you think I believe you are going to forgive me—you of all men in the world?"

"Lord knows what this man means! David," he said, impatiently, "leave off this nonsense about hiding and pretending and inferring. One would think you had been murdering somebody."

David sat down, staring with the blankest astonishment. He had by this time succeeded in impressing upon his brain the fixed conviction that his uncle kept his murderous assault a secret out of regard for the family name, and he came prepared to be submissive, to express contrition, and to offer, in return for the secret being still kept, to give back to his uncle the long-lost box full of papers. And now, this conviction destroyed, he knew not what to think or what to say.

The one thing which would have appeared to him the most impossible had happened—that is, in fact, the thing which always does happen. Nothing is really certain except the impossible. As for what is only unexpected—which the French proverb says is certain—that naturally happens every day, and we only notice it when it is something disagreeable. For instance: There is a boy in a quiet country town, quite an unknown and obscure boy, born to



be at best a small solicitor or a general practitioner in his native place. Behold! after a few years this humble boy has become a popular novelist, a leader at the bar, a great medical specialist, the best actor in the world, the best poet, the best dramatist of his time, or, it may be, the most accomplished villain, impostor, cheat, and ruffian. These are impossible things, and they are always happening. Happily, the impossible generally comes by degrees, which is merciful, because else we should all lose our reason in contemplation of the coming impossibilities. Ghosts are among the things impossible, which is at once the strongest argument for their existence, and the reason why their sudden appearance always produces staggers. No ghost in the world or out of it could have caused David Leighan such astonishment as the conduct of his uncle.

"It can't be!" he said—"it can't be! Uncle, you are playing some deep game with me; though what game, seeing how useful I can be to you if I like, I can't understand. You are like a cat with a mouse. You are old, but you are foxy; you've got a game of your own to play, and you think you'll play that game low down. Come," he made one more effort to ascertain if the impossible really had happened—"come. It's like a game of bluff, ain't it? But let's drop it, and play with the cards on the table. See, now, here's my hand—I heard last night that you were alive and hearty, though I had every reason to think you were dead. I was quite sure you were dead—I *knew* you were dead. You know why I knew. Every night I was assured by yourself that you were dead. Come, now! Well, when I heard that you were alive and hearty, I said to myself, 'To-morrow I'll go and have it out with him when all the people are at church and there's nobody to listen;' because they told me you could not remember—you know what."

"Couldn't remember? I'd have you to know, sir, that my memory is as good as ever it was."

"Oh!" said David, "then you do remember everything?"

"Of course I do."

"Then, uncle, have it out."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Let us talk open. I've never forgotten it. I have said to myself over and over again, 'I'm sorry I done it.'"



I wished I hadn't done it, especially at night when your ghost came; who ever heard of a live man's ghost?"

"The man's stark, staring mad!" cried Daniel.

"Come, now. Either say, 'David, I forgive you, because there was not much harm done after all; I forgive you if you'll help me in the way that you only can help me;' or else say, 'David, I'll bear malice all the days of my life.' Then we shall know where we are."

"I don't understand one word you say. Stay!" A thought suddenly struck him. "Stay! The last time I set eyes on you it was on the morning you left Challacombe, and on the same day that I met with my accident. The last time I set eyes on you was in this room. You cursed and swore at me. You went on your knees, and prayed the Lord in a most disrespectful manner to revenge you, as you put it. Do you wish me to forgive those idle words? Man alive! you might as well ask me to forgive the last night's thunder. Reproach yourself as much as you please—I'm glad you've got such a tender conscience—but don't think I am going out of my way to bear malice because you got into a temper six years ago!"

"Then you *do* remember, uncle," he said, with a sigh of infinite satisfaction. The Impossible had really happened.

"Well, I thought you would remember, and bear malice. It was the last you saw of me, you see—and the last I saw of you."

"Yes, it was the last I saw of you."

David laughed, not the hysterical laugh of last night, but a low laugh of sweet satisfaction and secret enjoyment.

"Well, uncle, since you don't bear malice—Lord! I thought you'd be flying in my face—there's no harm done, is there? And now we can be friends again, I suppose? And if it comes to foxiness, perhaps it will be my turn to play fox."

"Play away, David—play away."

"I've come home, you see"—David planted his feet more firmly and leaned forward, one hand on each knee—

"I've come home."

"In rags."

"In poverty and rags. I've got nothing but two or three pounds. When they are gone, perhaps before, I shall want more money. The world is everywhere full of rogues



—quite full of rogues—besides land thieves like yourself, and there isn't enough work to go round. Mostly they live like you, by plundering and robbing."

"Find work, then. In this country if you don't work you won't get any money. Do you think you are the more likely to get money out of me by calling names?"

"Well, you see, uncle, I think I shall find a way to get some money out of you."

"Not one penny—not one penny, David, will you get." There was a world of determination in Mr. Leighan when it came to refusing money.

"It's natural that you should say so, to begin with." His manner had now quite changed. He began by being confused, hesitating, and shamefaced; he was now assured, and even braggart. "I expected as much. You would rather see your nephew starve than give him a penny. You've robbed him of his land; you've driven him out of his house; and when he comes back in rags, you tell him he may go and starve."

"Words don't hurt, David," his uncle replied, quietly. "I am too old to be moved by any words. Now if you have nothing more to say, go."

David sat doggedly. He had always been dogged and obstinate. His uncle looked at him curiously, as if studying his character.

"David," he said, presently, "you were a bad boy at school, where they ought to have flogged it out of you. You were a bad son to your father, who ought to have cut you off with a shilling. You were a bad farmer when you got your farm: you were a drunkard, a betting man, and a sporting man. If I hadn't taken your land, a stranger would have had it. Now it's kept in the family. Years ago I thought to give you a lesson, and if you reformed, to give it back to you in my will. I now perceive that you are one of those who never reform. I have left it—elsewhere."

"Go on," said David; "I like to hear you talk."

"The old house at Berry—your old house—is turned into two cottages. One of those cottages is empty. If you mean to stay in the parish, you can live in it if you like, rent free, for a time—that is, until you get into work again or I find a tenant. If you choose to earn money, you can; there are always jobs to be done by a handy man.



If you will not work, you must starve. Now that is all I will do for you. When you are tired of Challacombe, you can go away again. That is my last word, nephew." He turned away, and began to busy himself again among his papers.

"After the accident and the loss of those papers you were senseless for three days. And after that you got paralysis. Why, what was all this, but a judgment on you for your conduct to your own flesh and blood?"

"Rubbish!"

David said no more. Those best acquainted with him would have understood from the expression of his face that his mind was laboriously grappling with a subject not yet clear to him. He was, in fact, just beginning to be aware of a very foxy game which he might play with his uncle, though as yet he only dimly saw the rules of that game. It was a new game, too, quite one of his own invention, and one which would at the same time greatly please and stimulate his uncle, whom he meant to be his adversary. He said nothing more, but he sat doggedly and tried to work out the rules of that game.

Presently Mary came home from church, and with her George Sidcote and Will. They found David sitting with his uncle, but the old man was reading the paper, and David was sitting silent, thinking slowly.

"Mary," said David, "you don't remember me, I suppose?"

"You are my cousin David. Of course I remember you, David, though you are altered a good deal." She gave him her hand. "All the people are talking about your return."

Then George and William shook hands with him cheerfully and brotherly.

"Why, David," said George, "we must rig you out a little better than this. Come home with Will and me."

David turned sullenly to his uncle.

"I've one thing more to say. All of you may hear what that is. He offers me a laborer's cottage to live in, and a laborer's work to do, and a laborer's wage for pay, on my own lands—my own that he stole, this old man here, sitting struck by a judgment in his chair. The next time I come here—you may all take notice and bear witness—the



question may not be how little I may be offered, but how much I shall take."

So far had he got in his understanding of the game that was to be played.

"How much," he repeated, with a chuckle—"how much I shall take."

"Dear me!" said his uncle. "This is very interesting. And how are you, Will? when did you come down? and how is your writing business? Take David away, George; I am afraid you'll find him very tedious—very tedious indeed."

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## CHAPTER IX.

### AT SIDCOTE.

WE took David away with us; but the old man was right; he was insufferably tedious. To begin with, his mind seemed absorbed; he answered our questions shortly, and showed no curiosity or interest in us, and pretended no pleasure at seeing us again; he was lumpish and moody. In fact, though at the time one could not know, he was laboriously arranging in his mind the revenge which he was about to take upon his uncle; and he was one of those men who can not think of more than one thing at a time.

"Mother," said George, "I've brought David Leighan to dinner. He came home last night."

The old lady gave him her hand, without the least appearance of surprise that David had returned in so tattered a condition. To be sure, Joseph Exon's kindly offices had made a difference, yet he looked rough and ragged still; his wanderings had clearly ended in failure.

"You are welcome, David," she said. "You will tell us after dinner some of your adventures. I hope you are come to settle again among your own people."

"My own people," he said, "have been so kind that I am likely to settle among them."

"I will take David upstairs, mother," said George, "for a few moments; then we shall be ready."

Everything at Sidcote looked as if it had always been exactly the same, and had never changed. In winter, with the snow lying on the tors and the lanes knee-deep in mud, Sidcote looked as if it was always winter. In the



summer, with the old, old garden ablaze with flowers, and the green apples turning red or yellow on the old branches, it seemed as if it must be always summer. In the parlor, where Mrs. Sidcote sat, the Bible before her, it seemed as if the dear old lady must have been always old and silver-haired, certainly she must always have been gentle and gracious. A farmer's daughter, a farmer's wife, and a farmer's mother—can such be a gentlewoman? It is borne in upon me, my brothers, more and more, and the longer I live, that gentleness doth not consist in gentle blood. Some noble lords there are of whom one has heard—but the thing may be false—that they are mere ruffians, devourers, and trampers upon virtue and fair honor; some noble ladies, it is whispered—but, indeed, I know them not—are mere seekers of pleasure, selfish, frivolous, and heartless. Whereas certainly in all ranks of life there are those who naturally follow the things which make for unselfishness, sweetness, sacrifice, and well-doing. Mrs. Sidcote was one of these. A little pleasant-voiced and pleasant-looking dame—now sixty years old or thereabouts, who will, I make no manner of doubt, live to be ninety-five at least.

The window of her room looks upon the garden, which is, as I have said, ancient, and full of old trees and old-fashioned flowers, set and planted in antique fashion. The house is old too—built of stone, with low rooms—two-storied, and thatched. Between the house and the road is the farm-yard, so that one can not get to the garden gate without taking observation of George's pigs and poultry.

When they came down-stairs, David presented a little more of his old appearance. There remained a certain slouching manner which suggested the tramp, and the sidelong look, half of suspicion, half of design, which is also common to the tramp; but as yet we knew nothing of his past life and adventures. George had fitted him with a clean shirt and collar—it is only at such times that one recognizes the great civilizing influence of the white collar, a neck-tie, socks—actually he had not worn socks, he casually told George, for five years—a pair of boots somewhat too large for him, because George's size of boots was proportionate to his length of limb, and a pocket-handkerchief. The pocket-handkerchief is even a greater civilizing influence than the collar. It is not in sight, and yet if one



has a pocket-handkerchief one must necessarily—one can not choose but to—live up to it. But a change of clothes does not immediately produce a change of manner; it takes time for these to work. David looked moody and resentful.

When he was dressed he sat down to dinner.

Then it was that we made a very painful discovery. Our friend, we found, had entirely forgotten the simplest rules of manners, the very simplest. It was clear that he must have gone down very low indeed in the social scale in order to get at those habits which he now exhibited. Were they acquired in the Pacific, or in Australia, or in America, where, as we afterward learned, David had spent his years of exile? I think in none of these places, because, though there are plenty of unsuccessful Englishmen everywhere, it is not reported that they make haste to throw off the manners of decent folk. He lost his manners because he had lost his self-respect, which is a very different thing from losing your money. Let us refrain from details, and observe only in general terms that he helped himself to food with fingers as well as with fork. After all, fingers came before forks, which is the reason why forks have four prongs. It shall suffice to mention that, the principal dish being a pair of roast fowls, he munched the bones and threw them on the floor; that he helped himself, with a wolfish haste, as if there was not enough to go round, and every man must grab what he could; and, like a savage or a wild beast, he looked about him jealously while he was eating, as if some one might snatch his food from him. During the operation of taking his food he said nothing, nor did he reply if he was addressed; and he eat enough for six men, and he drank as if he would never get tired of George's cider, which is an excellent beverage, but deceptive if you are so ill-advised as to think it has no strength.

The old lady began to question him; but David either did not hear, being wholly engrossed with his feeding, or else was too sulky and bearish to reply. Therefore she ceased to try; and we all sat looking on with pallid cheeks and ruined appetites, pretending not to notice that our guest had become a savage. Can one ever forget the way in which that delicate currant and raspberry pie—in London they call it “tart”—was, with its accompaniment of cream, dainty, rural, and poetical, mercilessly wolfed by



this greedy Orson? As soon as possible, Mrs. Sidcote, who usually sat and talked awhile after dinner, withdrew, and left us to battle with our guest.

After dinner, George produced a bottle of port.

"There is not much left," he said, with a sigh. "My father's cellar is nearly finished, but it will last my time. We will drink the last bottle together, Will, on my last day in Sidcote."

At all events, we drank wery little of that bottle, for David clutched the decanter, poured out a tumblerful, drank it off, and then another tumbler. Now two tumblerfuls of port, after a quart or so of cider, is a good allowance for any man. When David had taken his second tumbler he made as if he would say something. Perhaps he had it in his mind to say something gracious, for his lips moved, but no voice was heard. Then he got up and reeled to the sofa, on which he threw himself like a log, and was asleep in a moment. He was like an animal filled with food, and must sleep it off. It was remarkable that he lay in the attitude most affected by the sleeping tramp—namely, on his face. You will generally find the tramp who rests by the way-side sleeping with his face on his arms. Perhaps because this position affords more rest in a short time than any other; perhaps because it saves the shoulders from the hardness of the ground. David therefore lay in this attitude, and breathed heavily.

"We have not had much of the bottle, have we, old man?" said George. "Never mind; let us go into the garden and have a pipe in the shade."

We took chairs with us, and sat in the old-fashioned garden of Sidcote, under a gnarled and ancient apple-tree.

"Our David," I said, "was always inclined to be loutish. He has been developing and cultivating that gift for six years—with a pleasing result."

"There is something on his mind," said George. "Perhaps he will tell us what it is; perhaps not. David was never particularly open about himself. Strange that he should begin by looking for his uncle's grave! Why did he think that he was dead?"

"He believed what he hoped, no doubt."

"In the evening, Harry Rabjahns tells me, he had a kind of fit—a hysterical fit of laughing and crying—in the inn."



“That was perhaps because he had learned that his uncle was still alive.” This was indeed the case, though not in the sense I intended.

“And this morning, the first day of his return, he begins with a row with his uncle. Well, there is going to be mischief at Gratnor.”

“Why, what mischief can there be?”

“I don’t know. David went away cursing his uncle. After six years he comes back cursing him again. When a man broods over a wrong for six years, mischief does generally follow. First of all, the old man will do nothing for him. Do you understand that? There was a solid obstinacy in his eyes while he listened to David. Nothing is to be got out of him. What will David do?”

“He will go away again, I suppose, unless he takes farm-work.”

“David is as obstinate as his uncle. And he is not altogether a fool, although he did take to drink and ruined himself. And there will be mischief.”

“George, old man, I return to my old thought. If you and Mary marry without old Dan’s consent, her fortune goes to David. Does David know?”

“I should think not.”

“To which of the two would the old man prefer to hand over that money?”

“To Mary, certainly.”

“So I think. Then don’t you see that some good may come out of the business after all?”

“It may come, but too late to save Sidcote. He means to have Sidcote. My days here are numbered. Well, it is a pity after five hundred years”—he looked around at the inheritance about to pass away from him—only a farm of three hundred acres, but his father’s and his great-great-grandfather’s—and he was silent for a moment. “As for work, what would I grudge if I could keep the old place! But I know that over at Gratnor there sits, watching and waiting his chance, the man who means to have my land, and will have it before the end of the year.”

“Patience, George. Anything may happen.”

“He is a crafty and a dangerous man, Will. We can say here what we can not say in Mary’s presence. He is more crafty and more dangerous now that he is paralyzed and can not get about among his fields than he was in the



old days. He can not get at me by the same arts as he employed for David. He can not persuade me to drink, and to sign agreements and borrow money when I am drunk. But the bad times have done for me what drink did for David."

So we talked away the afternoon in a rather gloomy spirit. Life is no more free from sharks in the country than in the town; there are in Arcadia, as well as in London, vultures, beasts, and birds of prey, who sit and watch their chance to rend the helpless.

"And so," he said, summing up, "I shall have to part with the old family place, and begin in the world again; go out as David went out, and return, perhaps, as he returned."

"No, George; some things are possible, but not probable. That you should come back as David has come back is not possible."

At that moment the man of whom we spoke came slowly out of the house, rubbing his eyes.

"When you are among the blacks," he said, "you never get enough to eat. And as for their drink, especially the stuff they call orora, it is enough to make the dog sick."

"Then you have been among the blacks, David?" It was the first hint he had given of his adventures.

He lighted his pipe and began to smoke it lazily, leaning against the porch. Then he talked, with intervals of puffing at the pipe.

"Six years ago," he said—"six years it was, come October the twentieth, that I left Challacombe with £50 for all the money I had in the world. Yes, £50, instead of Berry Down that I'd begun with. Who'd got the land?" He pointed in the direction of Gratnor with a gesture which was meant for hatred and unforgiveness. "Ha! after I went away it seems that he had an ugly accident. No one knows the cause of that accident." He grinned as if he was pleased to think of it. "Quite a judgment—quite. A clear judgment, I call it. Where did I go first now? I took passage at Falmouth for New York, and there I stayed: it's a fine town for them as have got money, full of bars and drinking saloons, and—and—all sorts of pretty things. So I stayed there till all the money was gone—what's the good of £50? Better enjoy it, and have done with it. I made it last a good bit—two months and more.



Then I looked about for work. Well, it's a terrible hard place when you've got no money, and as for work, the Irish get all there is. By that I'd made a few friends, and we thought we'd go westward. There was a dozen or more of us, and we moved on together, sometimes getting odd jobs, sometimes legging it, and sometimes taking the cars. When there was no work, and I don't know that any of them were anxious—not to say *anxious*—to get work, we tramped around among the farms, and sometimes among the houses where the women are left all alone, and the men go off to town. It isn't easy for a woman to say 'No' when a dozen men come to the door and there isn't another man within a mile. Sometimes we would go to a saloon and play monte. Sometimes we would do a trade. My pals were a clever lot, and I often wonder why they took me with them. A clever lot, they were. But the band got broken by degrees. One got shot for kissing a farmer's wife; and another got hanged for stealing a horse; and another got his two legs amputated after a row over the cards. The odd thing was"—here David looked inexpressible things—"that all the men had done something except me. That was curious, now. You wouldn't expect in this country if you met a gang of tramps that they'd all done something, would you? All but me. They were anxious to know what I'd done. I told them what I ought to have done, and they agreed with me. Some of them were for my going home at once and doing it. Well, it might have been a year, and it might have been a dozen years, before those of us who were left found ourselves at San Francisco, where we parted company. I couldn't settle down very well—I don't know why. If a man begins wandering, he keeps on wandering, I suppose. How can a man settle down who's got no land of his own to settle on? So I—I moved on, after a bit. It was a pity to part when one had made friends, but there—it couldn't be helped."

He stopped at this point, to collect himself, I suppose; or perhaps to consider what portions of his autobiography would be best repressed. We looked at each other in amazement. By his own statement—it was not a confession: there was no sense of shame about the man—by his own unblushing statement he had, only a few weeks after leaving England, where he had once been a substantial yeoman, the companion and equal of respected, honorable



men, willingly consorted with a gang of roughs, who had all done something, and gone with them tramping along the roads of the States. How can a man fall so quickly?

"Well," David resumed, "I was bound to move on somewhere. Presently I heard of a ship that was going to the Pacific, and I went aboard as carpenter, and we sailed about. It wasn't a lucky ship, and she was wrecked one night in a storm, and all hands lost—except me. At least, I suppose so, because I never saw nor heard of any of them afterward. I was thrown ashore on an island called, as I learned afterward, New Ireland, and the people were going to spear me and eat me, when a German saved my life. Baron Sergius something his name was. He could talk their language, and they worshiped him. I stayed there perhaps a year—there's no way of telling how the time goes. Then a ship came and took me off. The baron was left behind, and I dare say he's eaten by this time. This ship was unlucky too: the captain set fire to her one night, and we had to take to the boats, where they were all starved to death, except the mate and me."

"Good Lord!" cried George, "here are adventures enough for a volume; and he reels them off as if they were quite common occurrences!"

"They picked us up, and brought us to Sydney; we had bad weather on the way, and were like to have foundered."

"Do you always bring disaster to every vessel that you go aboard of?" I asked.

"But we got in safe, and—and—well, that's all: I came home."

"And what are you going to do now you are come home, David?"

"I will tell you, George, in a day or two. The old man says he will do nothing for me—we'll see to that presently. He's turned the old farm-house at Berry into two cottages, and the buildings are falling to pieces. Says I can take up my quarters in one of the cottages, if I like: that is liberal, isn't it? And I am to earn my living how I can; that's generous, isn't it?"

"Try conciliation, David."

"No, Will; I think I know a better plan than conciliation."

This was all that David told us. We saw, indeed, very little of him after this day. He took what we gave him



without a word of thanks, and he did not pretend the least interest in either of us or our doings or our welfare. Yet he had known both of us all his life, and he was but five or six years older. A strange return! Knowing now all that I know, I am certain that he was dazed and confounded, first at finding his uncle alive, and next at the reception he met with. He was thinking of these things and of that new plan of his, yet imperfect, by which he could wreak revenge upon his uncle. This made him appear duller and more stupid than was his nature.

We sat waiting for more experiences, but none came. How, for instance, one would have been pleased to inquire, came an honest Devonshire man to consort with a gang of fellows who had all "done something," and were roving and tramping about the country ready to do something else. Before David lost his land he used to drink, but not with rogues and tramps. Yet now he confessed without any shame to having been their companion—a tramp and vagabond himself, and the associate of rogues. By what process does a man descend so low in the short space of two or three weeks as to join such a company? I looked curiously at his face; it was weather-beaten and bronzed, but there was no further revelation in the lowering and moody look.

"I dare say," he went on, "that you were surprised when I came to look for his grave?"

"It is not usual," I said, "to ask for the graves of living men."

"I was so certain that he was dead," he explained, "that I never thought to ask. Quite certain I was; why"—here he stopped abruptly—"I was so certain that I was going to ask what it was he died of. Yes; I wanted to know how he was killed."

"You said some one told you that he was dead. Who was that?"

"I will tell you now—not that you will believe me; but it is true. He told me himself that he was dead."

"I do not say, David, that this is impossible, because men may do anything. Permit me to remark, however, that you were in America, and your uncle was in England. That must have made it difficult for your uncle to talk with you."

"That is so," he replied. "What I mean is, that every



night—it began after I'd been in New York and got through my money—every night, after I went to sleep, his cursed ghost used to come and sit on my bed. 'David,' he said, 'I'm dead.' A lot more he said that you don't want to hear. 'David, come home quick,' he said. 'David, I'll never leave you in peace until you do come home,' he said. Every night, mind you. Not once now and again, but every night. That's the reason why I came home. The ghost has left off coming now."

"This is truly wonderful."

"What did he do it for?" asked David, angrily. "He'd got my land. Well, as for—as for—what happened, my score wasn't paid off by that."

"What did happen?"

"Never mind. He'd got my land still; and I was a tramp. What did he want to get by it?"

"You don't mean, David, that your uncle deliberately haunted you every night? No one ever heard of a living man's ghost haunting another living man. A dead man's ghost may haunt a living man, perhaps, though I am not prepared to back that statement with any experiences of my own. Perhaps, too, a living man's ghost may haunt a dead man; that would be only fair. Turn and turn about, you see. But for a live uncle to haunt a live nephew—no, David, no."

"He is crafty enough for anything. I don't care who done it," said David, "it was done. Every night it was done. And that's why I came home again. And since he's fetched me home on a fool's errand, he's got to keep me."

"But it wasn't his fault that the ghost came. Man alive! he wanted his own ghost for himself. Consider, he couldn't get on without it!"

"He brought me home, and he's got to keep me," said David, doggedly. Then he put on his hat and slowly slouched away.

"He is going to drink at the inn," said George. "I am glad he had the grace not to get drunk here. Will, there is something uncanny about the man. Why should he have this horrible haunting dream every night?"

"Remorse for a crime which he wished he had committed, perhaps. An odd combination, but possible. If he had murdered his uncle he might have been haunted in



this way. Wishes he had murdered him, you see. Imagination supplies the rest.”

“My opinion, Will, is that in the band of pals tramping across the North American Continent, the exception spoken of by David did not exist. They had all, every one, without exception, ‘done something.’ And now, lad, we’ll walk over to Gratnor and have tea with Mary.”

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## CHAPTER X.

### GRIMSPOUND.

ON the next day, Monday, a very singular and inexplicable thing happened—nay, two singular things—the full meaning of which I did not comprehend until accident—old-fashioned people would call it Providence—put the solution into my hands.

There is one place near Challacombe which those love most who know it best. Especially is it desirable when the air is still, and the sun burns in the valley, and in the narrow lanes around the slopes and outer fringe of the great moor. For my own part, it is like a holy place of pilgrimage, whither one goes time after time, and never tires of it, for refreshment of the soul and the eye. I left Sidcote at eight, before the morning freshness was quite gone from the air, though the sun at the end of July has then already been up for four hours, and followed the road which leads through Heytree Gate past Heytree Farm on the left, and the coppice on the right, where there was a solitary chiff-chaff singing all by himself on the top of a tree. The road leads to Widdicombe-on-the-Moor—the last place in these islands where the devil appeared visibly, having much wrath, before he sent the lightning upon the church and killed many of the congregation. After Heytree, the road runs for the best part of a mile over the open down where Mr. Leighan met his accident, until one comes to Hewed-stone Gate, where there is another farm-house, and where he who would stand upon the place of which I speak must turn to the right and follow the stream, which soon grows narrower until it becomes a trickling rill falling down a steep hill-side, and the rill becomes a thread of water, and the hill grows steeper, and the thread disappears and becomes a green line leading to still greener quags, higher



and higher up the hills. It is an immense great hog's back of a hill, three miles long from end to end; the ridge at the top is not steep and narrow, but half a mile broad at least, covered with heath and heather and whortleberry bushes. There is no path across Hamil Down, but this flat plain is the most glorious place in the world—even better than the long ridge of Malvern—to walk along on a warm summer day. The turf, before you reach the top, is dry and spongy to the tread; it is covered with the little yellow flowers of the tormentilla; here and there is gorse with its splendid yellow, and among the gorse you may find the pretty pink blossoms of the dodder, if you look for it. If you climb higher the wind begins to whistle in your ears, which is the first sign of being upon a mountain-side. You may sit on Primrose Hill all the year round, and the wind will never convert your ear into an Æolian harp; but climb the side of Helvellyn or walk over the Sty Head Pass, and before you have gone very far the old familiar ringing whistle begins, though the air below seemed still and the breeze had dropped. When you have reached the top, turn to the right and walk to King's Tor, the northern point of Hamil Down, and then sit down. There was a barrow here once, and at some unknown time it was opened, and now lies exposed and desecrated. Within is the round grave, cased with stones brought up the hill from below and ranged in a cup-like shape, in which they laid the body of the great, illustrious, and never-to-be-forgotten king. I will show you presently the place where he died, from which they brought him in long procession—the men and women alike long-haired, fair-skinned, and ruddy-cheeked—all mourning and lamenting. I know not the tunes of the hymns they sung, but I fear there was sacrifice at the grave-side, and that the soul of that kin was accompanied by many indignant souls of those who were slain to bear him company. It was a long time ago, however, and the thing itself wants confirmation; wherefore let us shed no tears. They have laid open the grave and taken away the torquils, bracelets, and crown of the king. Then, if there were any bones of him, they left them uncovered, so that the rains fell upon them and the frosts tore them apart, and now there is but a little dust, which you can not distinguish from the earth that lies around the grave. It is a high place, however, and beside it are boulders, where one



can sit and look around. On the north-east is Ease Down, with its long slopes, and the granite pile upon its highest point; and below Ease Down, Manaton Tor; above the church, and below Manaton, a spur runs out between the valleys, and there are Latchell Tor, Nymphenhole, and the Ridge. Below Nymphenhole stands Gratnor, where Mary is at this moment. I know it well, and I can fancy that I see her making a fruit pie for dinner and a cake for tea. I am sure that she has a white apron on—one of the long things up to the throat—her sleeves are rolled up, and she stands before the board with the rolling-pin and the pastry, taking great pains with the cake, because we are going to Gratnor to have tea with her, and after tea we shall walk along the Ridge and talk. Poor Mary! must she give up Challacombe and Sidcote, and go far afield with George in search of kinder fortune?

Beyond Manaton Tor you look down upon the rocky sides of Lustleigh Cleeve; turning your head to the east and southeast there rises before you a glorious pile of hills, one beyond the other. I say not that they are mountains, but I want no fairer hills. There is Hayne Down, with its bowlders thrown down the front, as if they were pebbles shaken from a young giant maiden's apron—this is, I believe, the scientific and geological explanation of their origin; there is Hound Tor, with its granite castle; behind it Hey Tor, with its two great black pyramids; on the right of Hey Tor there are Rippin Tor and Honeybag. Six miles away, hidden among the hills and woods, is Widdicombe Church, the cathedral of the moor. Turn to the west, and eight miles away you can see Kes Tor, where still stand the foundations of the houses built by those who placed the bowlders in a circle, and filled them in with turf, and then, with branches and a larch pole and more turf, made the place weather-tight and snug. With no chimney, and a cheerful fire of crackling sticks and plenty of smoke, they made themselves truly comfortable on winter nights, though somewhat red and inflamed about the eyes in the morning. South of Kes Tor there stretches the open moor, bounded by more tors in every direction. We are among the everlasting hills. A thousand years in their sight is but as yesterday. As these tors stand now, the grass climbing slowly over the rocks, so they stood a thousand years ago—the grass a few inches lower down, the rocks the



same, the slopes the same. Overhead a hawk, poised just as one sees now; the rabbits ran about the heather just as they do now; and, as now, the shifting shadows coursed across the slopes, and the curves of the hill-sides changed continually as the sun like a giant rejoiced to run his course. We come and go, and are no more seen; but the hills remain. I suppose that after millions of years they too will disappear, with the light of the sun, and the sweet air, and the green herbs, and flowers, and all the creatures; and then there will be darkness and death for all creation. But the Hand which started the myriads of worlds and set them steadfast in their orbits can re-create them and make a newer and a better world, of which this is but a shadow.

There was not a soul upon Hamil Down except myself. There never is, except sometimes about this season when the whortleberries are ripe, or when a shepherd comes in search of his Dartmoor flocks, or a wayfarer crosses from Challacombe over the hill, instead of coming round the road; or when one comes this way who knows the moor, and is not afraid of being belated, and ventures to make a short-cut from Post Bridge—built of three flat slabs of stone by the nameless king who was buried on this tor—by way of Vitifer to Challacombe or Moreton-Hampstead.

I had the whole of the great flat ridge to myself as I left King's Tor and walked briskly southward, avoiding the green quagmires which lie here and there, a pitfall to the many. Half-way along this upland plain there stands an upright stone. It is not a cross; nor is it, so far as one can judge, a tombstone. It is simply an upright stone of gray granite, six feet high. Beside it lies a small flat stone; it is called the Gray Wether. Who put it up, and why it was put up, not the oldest inhabitant can tell. Indeed, the oldest inhabitant, who was the last survivor in Grims-pound, died there about two thousand years ago, and there has been no oldest inhabitant since then.

I stood beside the Gray Wether Stone, making these and other admirable reflections. I am not quite certain whether I really did make them; but when one is a writer of leading articles, it is easy to fall into a literary way of thinking, and to shape one's thoughts into an effective line. However, I was shaken out of my meditations by a very singular accident. I had stood on the same spot dozens of times before this: any day the same accident might have hap-



pened, yet it did not. The accident waited, as accidents always do, until it might produce a coincidence. No one can explain coincidences; yet they happen continually—to every one of us who is on watch, one or two every day.

What happened was this. Between the upright stone and the flat stone, the edges of the latter being irregular, there is, at a certain place, an aperture or recess.

I carried with me a stick, on which I was leaning. Now, by this kind of chance which we call accident, in changing my position I stuck the point of the stick into the aperture—a thing of which one would have been hardly conscious but for an unmistakable clicking which followed, as of coins. Is there anything in the world which more excites and stimulates the blood than the discovery of hidden treasure? In ancient countries there are men who go about forever haunted with the idea of finding hidden treasure—in Italy, in Syria, in Greece, in Asia Minor—wherever ancient civilizations have passed away, leaving drachmas or shekels in buried pots, waiting for the lucky finder. One shudders to think of the eagerness with which I fell upon this imaginary hoard. No doubt, I hastened to conjecture, it was an ancient treasure which I was about to discover; a pile of Roman coins with the head of some almost forgotten emperor upon them; a heap of early Saxon coins—angels, marks, doubloons, rose-nobles at the very least. The opening, I found, was too small for a man's hand—perhaps a small six-and-a-quarter might have got in. If Mary were here—but Mary's hand is six-and-a-half, as becomes the hand of the capable house-wife. If man's fingers were longer, like those of the monkey with the prehensile tail, one of our ancestors might have found and fished out the coins in no time, and spent them recklessly in Kentish cobs, or the home-grown crab. Perhaps the flat stone might be moved? No; the hands which propped up the Gray Wether were mighty hands; perhaps the same which threw that apron full of bowlders over the face of Hayne Down. The flat stone was immovable. Perhaps with the stick I could at least feel the coins? Yes, I made them rattle. The position now became that of Tantalus. Who ever heard before of a buried treasure only twelve inches deep which could be felt but not dragged out? Why, it was not only a buried treasure, but perhaps a vast treasure; a collection of priceless coins, antique, unique, throwing



light upon dark places in history; giving personality and life to what had been before but a name or a string of names, the portraits and effigies of long-forgotten emperors and kings. I would have that treasure somehow. Many plans suggested themselves; sticky stuff on the end of a twig to which the coins might adhere, lazy tongs, common tongs, pincers—I would go back to Sidcote and lug up a sackful of instruments; I would go to Moreton-Hampstead and borrow another sackful of surgical instruments; I would even get a couple of stone-masons and saw that stone through. I would have that treasure.

One would not be without a conscience, but it sometimes sadly interferes with the pilgrim when paths of pleasantness open out before him; and here the voice of Conscience said, in her cold and unsympathetic way, "There is no rood of English ground but has its Seigneur. The Lord of the Manor in which stands Hamil Down is the Prince of Wales. After all your trouble you will have to take the treasure to H.R.H." "I'll be hanged if I do," was the reply of the natural man. "You'll be conveyed to the Peninsula of Purbeck marble if you don't," said Conscience, again.

It is no use arguing with a conscience which is at once persistent and sensitive. I therefore grumpily stuck the stick once more into the recess and poked about again. The coins rattled merrily. Never in my whole life have I so ardently desired to touch, to handle, to examine, to possess this unknown and unseen treasure.

Now when I took out the stick again a bit of yellow leather showed for a moment just hooked up by the ferule as far as the light penetrated. The sight of the leather inspired me with a faint hope. Again I poked about, but for some time in vain, until I hit upon a most ingenious and crafty contrivance. Like all really great things, it was also perfectly simple. In fact, I reversed the stick and fished with the handle, to such good purpose that in a very few moments I had the leather thong in my fingers and hauled it out.

The thong tied up the mouth of a small brown canvas bag, very much like that which is used by moderns in sending and fetching money from a bank. Did the Druids—did the ancient inhabitants of Grimspound—use canvas



bags for their banks? Or perhaps the Romans, from whom we have borrowed so many things, invented the canvas bag for the convenience of bank-clerks. It had an ancient and a musty smell, not unexpected in a bag perhaps as old as King Cymbeline or Queen Boduque. And the coins were within. Now for the treasure. Yet it must go to H. R. H., even if it should prove to be—what? As the sailor said when he found the bottle, “Rum, I hope; sherry, I think;” so I: “Roman, I hope; mediæval, I think; modern, by George!” Yes, the coins were modern; they were not Roman, or Saxon, or Norman, or early English; they were not even rose-nobles, marks, moidores, or doubloons; they were simply sovereigns, twenty in number, and two of them quite new, bearing the date of 1879. The date of the bag, therefore, could not be later than that year. It might have been dropped in the day before yesterday. Perhaps, however, there were more. No; the firm point of the stick struck against the hard stone all round the narrow recess, but there were no more coins. The bag was a modern bank bag, and the treasure was a collection of twenty coins all the same—namely, that Victorian gold piece which is now so scarce and so highly prized in country districts known as the sovereign. It was possible, indeed, that the Druids, who are supposed to have known so much, may have had a prophetic mint, and turned out these coins in anticipation of later times; but no: the theory seemed untenable.

‘Twenty sovereigns in a bag—a bank bag—a modern brown canvas bag. Who could have climbed up Hamil Down in order to hide twenty pounds in a little hole like this? Was it some philosopher careless of filthy lucre? No; in this country such a thinker exists no longer. Even the Socialists would divide equally among themselves—one man “laying low” to rob his neighbor of his share—and not throw away this treasure of good red gold. Had it been placed there by some one as a voluntary offering and gift to the unknown God of Fortune in order to avert his wrath, by some man overprosperous, as the rich king of old threw his ring into the sea? That might have been before the year 1879; since that time there has been nobody prosperous. Could it have been hidden there by a thief? But if thieves steal a bag of money, it is the bag, and not the money, that they hide away. The money they take to



a ken or a den, where their fraternity meet to enjoy the fruits of industry. No thief, certainly, concealed the bag in this place. It must therefore have been put there and hidden away by somebody for some secret purpose of his own. But what purpose? Who could possibly have brought a bag of twenty pounds to this wild spot, so distant from any place of human resort, and yet exposed to such an accident of discovery? Perhaps it was a magpie; in which case it only remained to find the maid. Only six years ago; perhaps less. Twenty pounds is a large sum to put away. Assuredly there was no one at all in the neighborhood of Hamil Down by whom twenty pounds could be "put away" without "feeling it," as is poetically and beautifully said. Twenty pounds! I kept counting the money, turning it over from hand to hand, looking again at the dates on the coins, and trying to think how this money came here, and why it could have been left here.

Finally I put the gold into the bag, tied it up again, and put it into my own pocket. Then I walked on, my beautiful literary meditations quite interrupted, and turned from a peaceful stream into a muddy and angry whirlpool. One does not like to be faced with a conundrum which can not be solved, and yet will not be quiet, but keeps presenting itself. In the fable of the king who was chased by the gadfly it is cunningly figured how a man went mad by trying to solve an enigma of which he could not find the answer, but which would never cease to trouble him.

Thinking of this curious "cache," I went on walking mechanically, till I found myself at the other side of the broad upland down. The sun by this time, which was eleven o'clock, was blazing hot, and I thought with yearning of rest and a pipe in the shade. The nearest shade accessible was across the shallow valley at my feet, and under the rocks of Hooknor opposite. Not quite half-way across I saw the long gray line which I knew to be part of the inclosure of Grimspound, on the lower slope of Hamil Down. Beyond Grimspound the ground began to rise with a gentle ascent to Hooknor, where I proposed to rest. The way down which I plunged is encumbered with quagmires, and is steep and rocky; a hill-side where adders hiss—I never, for my own part, heard this creature hiss, or clap its hands, or do anything except get out of the way as quickly as it could—and where rabbits also spring up at



your feet and scud away as if they had heard of rabbit-pie. Presently, however, I found myself within the ancient and honorable city of Grimspound, which has been in ruins for sixty generations of human beings. Sixty generations! It seems a great many. We who are the heirs of all the ages possess, as may be reckoned, so many ancestors of that period that they may be set down by the figure one, followed by eighteen naughts, which is about a hundred million times the whole population of the globe at that time. The difference is caused by the marriage of cousins.

Dartmoor has many of these ancient inclosures and sacred circles with avenues of stones, menhirs, dolmens, pierced stones, and other holy apparatus of a long-forgotten cult. Grimspound, which is the largest of them, is a great oblong, surrounded by what was once a strong wall, formed by rolling the bowlders down the hill and piling them one above the other. The wall is now thrown over. Outside the wall was once a broad ditch or fosse, which is now nearly filled up. Within the wall are a dozen small circles formed of stones laid side by side. They are the foundations of houses, like those of Kes Tor. The largest circle was doubtless the Royal Palace, or perhaps the sacred building of the priest, where he sat in solitary grandeur when he was not conducting some beautiful and awe-inspiring human sacrifice. The small circles were the habitations of the nobility and gentry of Grimspound. The common sort had to make their huts without any circles, because the stones were all used up. The Grimspounders had no enemies, because on this island everybody spoke the same language, and they were all cousins. But man's chief happiness is war and fighting; therefore they pretended to be at feud with all the other tribes, and so went foraging and driving the cattle, and attacked and were attacked, and had their great generals and their valiant captains—to every tribe its Achilles and Diomedes, and Nestor and Ulysses—just as their successors. All this fully accounts for Grimspound, and makes that place deeply interesting. At the same time, if any gentleman has a little pocket theory of his own about the origin and history of the place, we shall be pleased to hear him. The late ingenious Mr. James Fergusson, for instance, wrote a whole book to prove that Grimspound and its brother stone cities were all built the day before yesterday. This may be true; but, as above



stated, the absence of the oldest inhabitant prevented him from proving his case.

When I had walked across the length and breadth of Grimspound, and visited the spring just outside the wall—no doubt the scene of many a sanguinary fight, the besiegers trying to keep the besieged from getting at the water—and when I had drunk of the water which looks so brown as it trickles through the little pools among the peat, I walked slowly up the hill of Hooknor, and found my shady place beside the rocks and sat down and filled my pipe, still agitated with the abominable mystery and enigma of the canvas bag, yet thinking I could devote my mind uninterruptedly to its consideration and to the tobacco. But it was a day of mysteries.

Before I tell you what followed, please to bear in mind that, though one talks of valleys and the tops of hills, the Tor of Hooknor is a very low elevation, and is certainly not the fourth part of a mile from Grimspound; next, that the inclosure lies on the upland slope of the opposite hill, though low down. Therefore to one upon Hooknor it is spread out like a map—the map of an island, in which the outer wall represents the sea-coast, and the stone circles lakes or mountains, according to the fancy of the observer. Thirdly, that the air was so clear and bright, so free from vapor or haze, that every blade of grass and every twig of heather on the opposite hill seemed visible from where I sat; and, lastly, that I am gifted with very long sight, insomuch that when I take a book of small print I am fain, in order to get the full flavor of it, to set it up at one end of the room and to read it from the other. If you understand all this, you will perfectly understand what followed.

At the same time I was perfectly in the view of any one in Grimspound, had there been any one there.

There was no one within sight or hearing; there was not a sight or sound of human life to be seen, looking from Hooknor at the great massive hill of Hamil Down; neither up nor down the valley, from this place, could be seen a village, a clearing, a farm, or any trace of man. Thus I fell to thinking again about that bag. How on earth did it get into such a queer place? Such a thing no more got into such a place by accident than the wondrous order of



the Cosmos is arrived at by accident; it could not have been dropped out of anybody's pocket by accident—the figuration and situation of the recess forbade that. It could not, again, have been deposited very recently, considering the moldiness of the bag. I thought of putting it back and watching. But in order to watch one must hide, and there is no place in Hamil Down for even a dwarf to hide. Besides, if it had been left there five or six years before, the hiding-place might now be forgotten. And, again, one would have to watch continuously, and the top of Hamil would be bleak in winter and cold at night; and there would be difficulties about grub.

While I was thinking, the figure, which I began dimly to perceive through the nebulous veil of thought, was working his way slowly down the hill-side opposite by nearly the same way as I had myself picked among the bowlders. He came plodding along with the heavy step and rolling shoulders of one who walks much over plowed fields and heavy land—George Sidcote had acquired that walk since his narrowed circumstances made him a hind as well as a master. This man looked neither to right nor left. Therefore he was not only a countryman, but one who knew the moor, and was indifferent as rustics seem—but they are not in reality—to its beauty and its wildness. As he came lower, I observed that he walked with hanging head, as if oppressed with thought; and presently, though his face remained hidden, I recognized him. By his mop of red hair, by his great beard, by his rolling shoulders, this could be no other than David Leighan. What on earth was David wanting on Hamil Down, and whither was he going? It was our returned prodigal, and the suspicion occurred to me immediately that not only was the prodigal impenitent, but that he was “up” to something. It might have been a suspicion as unjust and unkind as it was baseless, but it certainly crossed my mind. Where was he going, and why?

It thus became apparent that he was making for Grimpound. For if he had been going to Challacombe he would have kept higher up; and if he had been going to Vitifer or to Post Bridge, he would have kept on straight for a quarter of a mile before striking the path; but he made straight down the hill, just as I had done. Was David also then among the archæologists? Was he going to verify on



the spot a theory on their purpose and construction—first conceived, perhaps, among the blacks!

Whatever he was in search of he had a purpose in his mind. His face, which I could now make out plainly under the shade of his felt hat, was set with a purpose. Your naturally slow man, when he has a definite purpose in his mind, shows it more intelligibly than the swift-minded man, who jumps from one idea to another. He was going to Grimspound—perhaps the purpose marked in his face was only a determination to sit down and take a pipe among the ruins. In that case he might take it kindly if I were to shout an invitation to come up and join me. But no. When he should see me it would be time enough to shout.

In the corner of Grimspound, nearest to Hamil Down, there are lying piled one above the other three or four stones a good deal bigger than those which form the greater part of the wall. They lie in such a way—I presently ascertained the act by investigation—that there is formed a little cave, dry, quite protected from rain, dark, and long, its back formed by the lower part of a round boulder, while one side, sloping floor, and sloping roof are formed by these flat boulders. David, I observed—though I knew nothing then about this little cave, I dare say there are many others like it in the inclosure—made straight for the spot without doubt or hesitation. He had, therefore, come all the way from Manaton to look for something in Grimspound. This was interesting, and I watched with some curiosity, though I ought, no doubt, to have sung out. It must be something he had brought home with him—something valuable. He was not, perhaps, so poor as he seemed to be. When one comes to think of it, a man must have some possessions; it is almost impossible to travel about for six years and to amass nothing; one must have luggage of some kind when one crosses the ocean all the way from Australia to England.

He stopped at this convenient hiding-place. Then he looked around him quickly, as if to assure himself that no one was present to observe him; I wonder he did not see me. Then he stooped down, reached within some cavity hidden to me, and drew out something.

It was in a big blue bag. I could plainly see that the blue bag, like my canvas bag, was weather-stained. He laid the bag upon a stone, and proceeded to draw out its



contents, consisting of a single box. It was a box about two feet long and eighteen inches wide, and two or three inches deep. It was a tin box. What had David got in his box? I might have walked down the hill and asked him that question, but one was naturally somewhat ashamed to confess to looking on at what was intended for a profound secret. Let him take his box and carry it back to his cottage. I made up my mind on the spot, and nothing that followed in the least degree caused me to waver in that conviction—indeed, I heard very little of what had happened for some time afterward—that the box had been brought home by David; and I was quite certain that it contained things which he had gathered during his travels. What things? Well, they have coral, pearls, shells, feathers, all kinds of beautiful things in the islands of the Pacific. We shall soon find out what they were.

Good! David was not, then, quite a pauper. It is always pleasant to find that the returned exile has not done altogether so badly for himself. Let him keep his secret, and reveal it in his own good time.

David was so anxious to keep the secret that he actually took off his jacket—the sailor's blue jacket—wrapped it round the bag, and tied it up securely with string. Then, without looking about him any more, he turned and walked back as slowly and deliberately as he had come, carrying the treasure under his arm. As soon as his figure had surmounted the brow of the hill and had disappeared, I got up and sought the hiding-place in the wall of Grimspound. It really was a place into which nobody would think of looking for anything. The top stone sloped downward over the mouth, so as almost to hide it. In this cluster of four great stones no one would have dreamed of finding or of looking for anything. David's hiding-place was well chosen.

Then I followed, walking slowly, so that I might not catch him up on his way home with his tin box full of queer things from the Southern Seas.

The extraordinary coincidence, which I did not in the least suspect, was that on the very same morning that David went to recover the box I should light upon the bag. You will understand presently what a remarkable coincidence that was.

In the evening I told George all that had happened, and produced the brown canvas bag. George did exactly what



is usual under such circumstances: without some conventional manner of receiving things, even surprises of the most startling kind, life would be too jumpy. He took the bag, looked at it, opened it, poured out the gold, counted it, held it in his hand and weighed it; looked at it again, put it back into the bag, and laid the bag on the table.

"It is weather-stained, old man," he said, "and smells of the mold. I should think it had been there some time." He took it up again and turned it round. "Look!" he said, "here are initials; they are nearly faded, but they are certainly initials. I make out an A—no, a B; or is it a D?—and an L. Certainly an L; B. L. or D. L., which is it?"

"Looks to me," I said, turning the bag about in the light, "looks like B. A.; but it may be D. L."

"Will," he cried, "I believe you have really found something important. Six years ago, when Daniel Leighan fell off his pony, he always declared that he lost twenty pounds in gold. It was tied up, he always says, in a canvas bag. This must be his bag and these must be his initials. I am quite sure of it."

"Very odd, if it is so. Why should a man steal a bag of money only to put it—money and all—into a hole and then go away and leave it?"

"Well, I take it that the thief put the bag there meaning to return for it, but forgot where he put it."

"You *can't* forget the Gray Wether Stone, George. There is only one Gray Wether Stone on Hamil Down, and who in the world would go all up Hamil on purpose to hide a bag of money when there are hiding-places in every stone wall about the fields?"

"Take it to Daniel to-morrow and show it to him, Will. He always declares that he was robbed of this money as well as of his bonds and securities. Nobody has ever believed him, because it seems unreasonable that a robber should take twenty pounds and leave fifty. But if it is proved that he is right about the money, he may also be right about the bonds."

Strange that neither of us thought of connecting David's box, which he fished out at Grimspound, with his uncle's bonds. But then I did not know that the bonds were in a box; one thinks of bonds as a roll of paper.

"As for David's box," said George, "I agree with you,



Will, that it is best to say nothing about it. Let him keep his secret. If it is valuable, so much the better. We will keep the thing to ourselves. But as for the canvas bag, you must certainly take it to Gratnor to-morrow, and give Daniel the chance of claiming it.”

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## CHAPTER XI.

### DAVID'S REVENGE.

HAD I taken that canvas bag to Gratnor early in the morning instead of the evening, many things might have turned out differently; among other things, David's extraordinary scheme of revenge might never have been possible. If I had told Daniel Leighan the strange thing I had witnessed from Hooknor Tor, he must certainly have connected the box taken from Grimspound with the box of his own papers. As for me, however, I knew nothing till much later about that box of papers.

The scheme was almost worthy of David's American pals—the gentlemen who had all “done something.” The box, when David had carried it home, proved to be quite full of papers. His own knowledge of papers and their value was slight, but he knew very well that signed papers had been his own destruction, and that the possession of signed papers made his uncle rich. I do not suppose that he could have known anything at all about shares, warrants, bonds, coupons, and such things. But he did know, and understood clearly, that the loss of a box full of papers would certainly entail the greatest inconvenience, and might cause a grievous loss of property. The loss of ordinary papers, such as share certificates and the like, causes only temporary inconvenience, which may be set right by payment of a small fee. But there are some kinds of papers the loss of which simply means that of the whole investment represented. Among these, for instance, are coupons representing certain municipal bonds. They are made payable to bearer, and if they are lost can not be replaced. In this tin box David found certain coupons of this kind. They represented an investment of nearly £3000. This is a large sum of money, even in the eyes of a rich man; think what it means to a man who has made his money by scraping and saving, by scheming how to best his neighbor,



and by being as eager to save sixpence in a bargain as to force a sale for his own advantage! Three thousand pounds! It was the half of the money which Daniel Leighan held in trust for Mary until she should marry with his consent. He had almost brought himself to think that it was part of Mary's fortune which had been lost, and that he would be able to deduct that sum from the amount which he must pay her when he suffered her to get married. Three thousand pounds lost altogether! For now six years had passed away, and there was not a single clew or trace of those coupons, so that those who did not believe that Daniel had been robbed were inclined to think that the papers, wherever he had left them, must have been destroyed in spite of their owner.

David called upon his uncle about eleven in the forenoon. He was received with the cordiality generally extended to all needy relations, and to those who think they have a right to expatiate upon their misfortunes and to ask for a temporary loan.

Mr. Leighan shuffled his papers as a sign that he was busy and wished the call to be short, nodded his head with scant courtesy, and asked his nephew what he came for.

"I've come, uncle," David began very slowly, spreading himself upon a chair like unto one who means to stay. In fact, he placed his hat upon another chair, drew out his pocket-handkerchief and laid it across his knees, and produced a small brown paper packet. "I've come, uncle—"

"Don't be longer than you can help, David. Get to the subject at once, if you can. Say what you came to say, and then go away and leave me with my own business. It's high time you were looking after your own. Will George Sidcote give you a job?"

"Damn your jobs!" said his nephew, flaming.

"I hear you borrowed a bed yesterday, and a chair and a table, and that you have settled in the cottage—my cottage. Very good. I don't mind if you have it rent free till you get into work, when you'll have to pay your rent like your neighbors. If you begin any more nonsense about robbing you of your land, out you go at once."

David at the risk of seeming monotonous, uttered another and a similar prayer for the destruction of his uncle's cottage.

"If that is all you came to say, nephew, the sooner you



go the better. And the sooner you clear out of my cottage and leave the parish—do you hear, sir?—leave the parish—the better, or I'll make the place too hot for you—”

“I didn't come to swear at you, uncle,” said David, more meekly. “If you wouldn't keep on—there, I've done; now hold your tongue and listen. I've got something very serious to say—very serious, indeed—and it's about your business, too!”

“Then make haste about it.”

“Six years ago, they tell me, you were robbed, that night when you fell off your pony, after I'd gone away.”

“It was the evening of that very day.”

“Ah!”—David's eyes smiled, though his lips did not—“we little thought when I used those words with which we parted, how quick they'd come true. When you lay there on the broad of your back, now, your face white and your eyes open, but never seeing so much as the moon in the sky, did you think of your nephew whose farm you'd robbed, and did you say, ‘David, 'tis a judgment’?”

“No, I didn't, David.” Afterward Daniel wished that he had denied the truth of those details about the white face and the eyes which saw nothing; because if a man is solemnly cursed by his nephew in the morning, and gets such a visitation in the evening it does look like a Providence, regarded from any point of view. He did not, however, ask or suspect how David arrived at those details. “I didn't say that, David. You may be quite sure I didn't say that.”

“You felt it all the more then. Very well. While you lay there, as they tell me, some one comes along and robs you. What did you lose, uncle? Was it your watch and chain and all your money?”

“No; my watch and chain were not taken, and only a little of the money.”

“Uncle, are you sure you were robbed? Do you think that robbers ever leave money behind them? Was the money taken in notes, or was it in gold?”

“It was all in gold; fifty pounds in one bag, twenty pounds in the other, and both bags in one pocket. The small bag was taken and the big bag left. But what does it matter to you?”

“You shall see presently. I am going to surprise you, uncle. What else did you lose besides the little bag?”



"I lost a box of papers—but what does it matter to you? Did you come here to inquire about my robbery? I suppose you are glad to hear of it."

"Never mind, uncle. You go on answering my questions; I've got my reasons. I am going to surprise you. Wait a bit."

"Well, then; but what can you know? It was a tin box secured by a lock and tied round with a leather strap; I carried it in a blue bag—a lawyer's bag—hanging round my neck for safety."

"What was in that box, did you say?"

"David!" the old man changed color, and became perfectly white, and clutched at the arms of his chair and pulled himself upright, moved out of himself by the mere thought. "David! have you heard anything? have you found anything?"

"Wait a bit; all in good time. What was in that box, did you say, again?"

"Papers."

"What kind of papers? Were they papers, for instance, that might make you lose money?"

"Money? David, there were papers in that box that could never be replaced. Money? I lost with that box papers to the tune of three thousand pounds—three thousand pounds, David—all in coupons!"

"It was a judgment! Why, my mortgages were not so very much more. Three thousand pounds! Come, even you would feel that, wouldn't you? Were there actually three thousand pounds in that box?"

"The man who stole that box might have presented those coupons one by one, and got them paid as they fell due, without questions asked—that is, he could until I stopped them. Oh! I could stop them, and I did; but I could never get them paid until I presented them through my own bankers. David, if you are revengeful, you may laugh; for it is a blow from which I have never recovered. They say that the paralysis in my legs was caused by falling from the pony, whereby I got, it seems, concussion of the brain. But I know better; David. A man like me does not get paralyzed in the legs by falling on his head. 'Twas the loss of all the money—the loss of three thousand pounds—that caused the paralysis. And now I sit here all day long—I who used to ride about on my own land all day



long!—and I try to think, all day and all night, if I could have left that box anywhere, or given to any one that bag of twenty sovereigns. David, tell me—I will reward you if you tell me anything to my advantage—have you heard something?”

David nodded his head slowly.

“Three thousand pounds,” he repeated. “It was three thousand pounds.”

“I’m not a rich man, David, though you think I am. As for taking your farm, if I hadn’t taken it, somebody else would; for you were a ruined man, David—you were a ruined man. And now, even, if I leave it to you in my will, for I must leave my property to some one—it is a hard thing that a man can’t take his property with him when he dies!—it would be little use, because Mary’s money must come out of it. Oh! it was a hard blow—a cruel, hard blow.”

“Yes,” said David. “As a judgment, it was a—a—a—wunner. I never heard of a nobler judgment. Three thousand pounds!—and a fall off your pony!—and a paralysis!—all for robbing me of my land. Did you ever offer any reward?”

“No. What was the good?”

“Would you give any reward?”

“I would give—I would give—yes—I would give ten pounds to get that box back again.”

“Ten pounds for three thousand. That’s a generous offer, isn’t it?”

“I’d give fifty pounds—I’d give a hundred—two hundred—four hundred, David.” He multiplied his offer by two every time that David shook his head.

“You’d have to come down more handsome than four hundred to get back three thousand pounds. Well,” he rose as if to go, “that’s all I’ve got to say this morning. That will do for to-day. Much more handsome you would have to come down.”

“David!” cried his uncle, eagerly, “what do you mean by being more handsome. Tell me, David—do you know anything?”

“Why,” said David, “I may know, or I may not know. What did I tell you? Didn’t I say that I might have something to sell? Well—that’s enough for this morning!” He moved toward the door.



"David, David, come back! What have you got to sell?"

"That is my secret"—he stood with his hand on the door-handle—"if you tell a secret, what is the good of it?"

"David, stop—stop! Do you know where that box was taken? Oh! David, put away your hard thoughts. Remember you were ruined already. I didn't ruin you; my heart bled to see your father's son ruining himself."

David made the same remark about his uncle's heart as he made concerning his reference to jobs and his allusion to the cottage.

"Look here, uncle; perhaps the box exists, and perhaps it doesn't. Perhaps I have learned where it is, and perhaps I haven't. Perhaps I've got a paper out of the box in my pocket at this minute, and perhaps—well, what would you give me for a paper out of the box, taken out this very morning, none of the other papers having been so much as touched? Not one of the books full of those coupons, or whatever you call them, but a paper worth nothing. What would you give for that, just to show that the others can be laid hold of?"

"Oh! give it to me, David;" the old man stretched out both hands with yearning eyes; "let me look at it. Can it be that the box is found after all, and safe?"

"If it is found, depend upon it that it is safe, uncle. Take your oath of that. The man who's got that box won't let it go in a hurry, particularly when he knows what's inside of it. Three thousand pounds! and, perhaps, if he knew it, his own, for the trouble of presenting them at the right place."

"They've been stopped," Daniel explained, for the second time. "You don't know what that means, perhaps; it means that any one who presents those papers for payment will find the money stopped, and himself taken up for unlawful possession of the coupons—unlawful possession, David—which is seven years, I believe!"

Perhaps he was not wise in giving this warning. For it stands to reason that the coupons might have been presented, and so the possessor been detected and the whole recovered.

"Very well," said David, who had that valuable quality, often found with the slow mind, of imperturbability. "But you can't touch the money without the papers, can



you? Not you. Very well, then. Without talking of those coupons, as you call them, for the present, what should you say supposing I was to show you now—this minute—one of the other papers that were in the box?"

"Do you mean it, David? do you mean it?"

"I mean business, uncle. I mean selling, not giving."

"I suppose," said Daniel, trying to preserve a calm exterior, but trembling down to the tips of his fingers—"I suppose, David, that the man who has the box has communicated with you because he thinks you are my enemy?"

"You may suppose so, uncle, if you like."

"And that he is willing to make a deal. He would give up the papers which are of no use to him in return for hard cash—eh, David?"

"You may suppose that, too, if you like."

"Papers stolen from me—papers the unlawful possession of which would insure him a long imprisonment?"

"Just as you like, uncle. Only—don't you see?—at the first mention of the word 'imprisonment' all these papers would be dropped into the fire, and then—where are you? No more chance of recovering a penny!"

"Show me—prove to me—that you know something about the box."

"I am going to prove it to you." David left the door and came back to the table, standing over his uncle.

"What will you give me, I ask you again, for only one paper out of the box, just to prove that the other papers exist?"

"What paper is it?"

"You shall see; one of the papers that are worth nothing. I have actually got it in this packet, and you shall have it if you give me ten pounds for it; not a penny less—ten pounds. If you refuse, and I have to take it back, ten pounds' worth of the coupons—now that I know their value—shall be torn up and burned. To-morrow I shall come back and make the same proposal, and the next day the same, and every day that you refuse you shall have ten pounds' worth of those coupons burned. When they are all gone you will be sorry."

Daniel's lips moved, but no words followed. The audacity of the proposal, which really was almost equal to a certain famous proposal in "The Count of Monte-Cristo," though neither of them had read that book, took his breath



away; but if David really had access to the box, he was undoubtedly the master of the situation. Mr. Leighan was the more astonished, because hitherto he had supposed his nephew to be a fool. (Very few men are really fools, though their faculties may lie dormant.) David, before his bankruptcy, was incapable of perceiving his own opportunity in anything; David, since his wanderings, especially with those rovers of America who had all "done something," had improved.

"How do I know?" Mr. Leighan asked. "How can I tell that when you have got the ten pounds I shall be any nearer my coupons?"

"This way, uncle. Oh, I have found the way to convince even you. In a day or two I shall come with another paper out of the box—one of those which are no use to anybody—and you shall buy that of me on the same terms. If you don't I shall begin to burn the coupons. When we have got through all the worthless papers we shall get to the coupons, and then I shall begin to sell them to you as fast as you like to buy them, uncle—that is to say, if we can agree upon the price. And I promise you that, before you have bought them back, you will be sorry that you ever foreclosed on Berry Down. It will be the dearest bit of land you ever got hold of. Uncle Daniel, I think that before I've done you will acknowledge that we are more than quits. I've seen a bit of the world since I saw you last, and I've learned a thing or two."

Daniel groaned.

"Uncle, before you give me that ten pounds, tell me how the devil you was able to send your own ghost after me every night?"

"What do you mean?"

"I say, how did you haunt me every night? Why did you command me to come home? What did you do it for?"

"What did I do it for?"

"After all, I'm come, and what is the consequence? Mischief to you, money to me; that's what has come of it. Mischief to you, money to me." The jingle pleased David so much that he kept on repeating it, "Mischief to you, money to me!"

"Oh! I don't know—I don't know what this man means!" the old man cried, in distress. "What *does* he



mean with his haunting and his ghost and his orders? Nephew, I am getting tired of this. Show me the paper if you have it with you, and I will tell you what I will do. Put it into my hands."

"Well, I don't mind doing that. If you tear it up I shall want the ten pounds just the same. It doesn't matter to me if you tear up all the papers. Now," he unfolded the brown paper packet, "what do you think of this?" He took out a paper somewhat discolored by damp, "What is this? 'The last Will and Testament of Daniel Leighan.'" He placed it in his uncle's hands.

"This is a precious document, truly," said Daniel, "a valuable document. Why, man, I've made another will since."

"I don't care how many wills you have made. I don't care whether it is valuable to you or not. To me it is ten pounds. Ten pounds, uncle. Tear it up or burn it, just as you like. But ten pounds."

"If I give it to you, how do I know that you will give me back my coupons?"

"Why, you had better not even think of my giving you back your coupons. When did you ever give anything to anybody? Do you think I shall return your generosity by giving you anything? No, I shall sell you those coupons one by one. You shall see your thousands melt away every day, just as you are getting them back into your hands. You took my land away at a single blow. I shall take your money from you bit by bit, little by little, like pulling out your teeth one by one."

"You are a devil, David. You were only a fool when you went away. You have come back a devil."

"Who made me, then? You! Come, don't let us talk any more. There is your paper. Give me my ten pounds and I will go. To-morrow or next day, just as I please, I shall come back."

Daniel Leighan's hands trembled, and he hesitated. But he did not doubt his nephew's words. He knew that the box had been somehow recovered, and that his papers were in David's reach, if not in his power.

He opened his desk, and took out of it one of those little round boxes which are made for bottles of marking ink. A sovereign just fits into those boxes. He kept one in his desk filled with sovereigns. Mary went over to Moreton



once a month to get the money for him. He held this box tightly in his left hand, and began very slowly to count out ten pounds.

"Here, David," he said, with a heavy sigh; "here is the money. Heaven knows it is hard enough in these times to make ten pounds, and harder to give them away. The Lord send you a better heart, David."

"Thank you, uncle; the same to you, I'm sure. If we both had better hearts, uncle, what fools we should look—eh?"

"If you had read this will, David, you would have found yourself put down for something good. Well, so far I forgive you. But don't tempt me too much, or you may find my real last will and testament a very different thing. You are my nephew, David—my only nephew—and I've got a good deal to leave—a good deal to leave, David."

"As for my inheritance, uncle, I am going to take it out of you bit by bit—a little to-day and a little to-morrow. I shall enjoy it better that way. I think that's all. Oh, no! You may be thinking to charge me with unlawful possession of your property. If you do, the whole of the papers will go into the fire. Remember that! And now, uncle, I think I've done a good morning's work, and I'll go away and have some beer and a pipe. Take care not to talk about this little matter to any one, or it will be the worse for you—mind, not to Mary or to George or anybody. If you breathe a word, all the papers go into the fire."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SECOND DREAM.

WHEN Mary came in about one o'clock to clear the table and lay the cloth for dinner she found her uncle in a very surprising condition. He was in tears—actually in tears. He had been weeping. How long ago was it since Daniel Leighan had been seen to weep? The misfortunes of his neighbors passed over him, so to speak, and left him dry-eyed; as for himself, he had met with no misfortunes in his life except the loss of his box of papers and the paralysis of his lower limbs. This is a grievous thing to endure, but a man—an old man—does not weep because one of the afflictions of age falls upon him.



Yet Daniel's eyes were wet with tears, and his papers lay untouched upon the table, and he had turned his head unto his pillows, as Ahab turned his unto the wall.

"Why, uncle," cried Mary, "whatever is the matter?"

"I wish I was dead, Mary! I wish I was dead and buried, and that it was all over!"

"Why, uncle? Are you ill?"

"No; I would rather be ill. I could bear any pain, I think, better than this."

"Then what is it? You are trembling. Will you take a glass of wine?"

"No, I can't afford it. I can't afford any luxury now, Mary. You will have to watch over every penny for the future."

"What has happened, then?"

"I am a miserable man. I have been miserable for six years, thinking over my papers; but I always hoped to find them. And now—"

"Now, uncle?"

"Now they are found—that is all. They are found, and I never really lost them till they were found."

"Where were they, after all?"

"I can not tell you, Mary. I only heard to-day—by post—by a letter—not by word of mouth—that they are found. And they are in the hands of a—of a villain; a villain, Mary, who will rob me of I know not what, before I get them back. Don't ask me any more, don't tell any one what I have said; I must have told some one, or I should have died. Don't speak to me about it; I must think—I must think. Oh! never in all my life before did I have to think so hard."

He could eat no dinner; this morning's business had taken away all desire for food. After dinner he refused his brandy and water, on the ground that he could no longer afford brandy and water. He also made pathetic allusions to the work-house.

"Come, uncle," said Mary, "you will make yourself ill if you fret. You have said for six years that you had lost this money, and now you find that you really have lost it—if you have—and you cry over it as if it was a new thing. Nonsense about the work-house; you are as rich as you were yesterday. Take your brandy and water. Here—I will mix it for you."



He took it, with many groans and sighs.

"Mary," he said, "David has been here again. He says it is all a judgment."

"All what, uncle?"

"All the trouble that has fallen upon me—the fall from the pony, the loss of the papers, the very paralysis; he says it is a judgment for my taking his land. Do you think that it is a judgment, Mary? Perhaps I was hard upon the boy; but one couldn't stand by and see a beautiful piece of property going to rack and ruin without stepping in to secure it. If I hadn't lent him the money on mortgage, another would; if I hadn't sold him up, another would—and it is all in the family; that's what David ought to think, and not to come here swearing and threatening. In the family still; and who knows whether I sha'n't leave it to him? I must leave it to some one, I suppose. If it is a judgment, Mary—" He paused for a word of comfort.

"Well, uncle," she said, "we are taught that we bring our sufferings upon ourselves; and be sure, if everybody was good, there would be a great deal less suffering in the world. Nobody can deny that."

"But not such a lot of judgment, Mary. All this fuss because David had to sell his farm, and I bought it! I can't believe that. Why don't other people get judgments, then?"

"Patience, uncle. Think—whatever happens now about that money, that it was lost six years ago."

"Ah! you keep on saying that. You don't understand what it is to have the thing you had despaired of recovering dangled before your eyes and then taken away again. What does a woman understand about property? David laughed. There's something come over David. He is just as slow as ever in his speech, and in his ways, but he's grown clever. No one could have guessed that David could go on as he went on here this morning."

"What has David to do with it, uncle?"

"With the property? Nothing, Mary, nothing," he replied, hastily. "Don't think that he has anything to do with it." He groaned heavily, remembering how much, how very much, David had to do with it.

"Can I do anything? Can George do anything?"

"George would like to see me wronged. It is an envious world, and when a man gets forward a bit—"



"Uncle, it is not true that George would like to see you wronged."

"Then there is one thing he could do. It seems a big thing, but it is really a little thing. If George would do it, I would—I would—I would—no: because I should only lose the money another way."

"You mean you would give your consent, uncle?"

"No—no; I can't do that. I couldn't yesterday; much less to-day, Mary."

"Well, what is this thing that George could do for you?"

"A villain has got my property, Mary. George might go and take it from him. If I had the use of my limbs, I'd dog and watch that villain. I would find out where he had put the property. I would tear it out of his hands if I could get it no other way. Old as I am, I would tear it from his clutches."

"George can hardly do that for you, uncle. Especially when you refuse your consent to our marriage, and are going to drive him out of Sidcote, as you drove David out of Berry."

Mr. Leighan shook his head impatiently.

"It's business, girl; it's business. How can I help it?"

"Well, then, uncle, if you are in real trouble, send for George, and let him advise you."

"George, advise—me! Mary, my dear, when I begin to want advice of any man, send for the doctor and order my coffin. I might use George's arms and legs; but my own head is enough for me, thank you."

He said no more, but took his pipe and began to smoke it.

"There is another way," he said. "But I doubt whether you have sufficient affection for your uncle to try that way."

"Is it something that I could do? Of course I will do it, if I can."

"Will you? It's this, girl. Hush! don't tell anybody. It's this: David has got a secret that I want to find out. How he got hold of the secret I don't know, and so I can't tell you. Somebody has told him this secret. Now," his voice sunk to a whisper, "David was always very fond of you, Mary; and he is that sort of man as a woman can do what she pleases with him. Pretend to let him make love



to you—pretend that you are in love with him. Wheedle the secret out of him, and then tell me what it is.”

“And what would George say while I was playing this part? Uncle, if you have such thoughts as that, you may expect another judgment.”

He groaned, and went on with his pipe. Then he took a second glass of brandy and water, because he was a good deal shaken and agitated. Then he finished his pipe in silence, laid it down, and dropped asleep.

But his slumber was uneasy, probably by reason of his agitation in the morning; his head rolled about, he moaned in his sleep, and his fingers fidgeted restlessly. At four o'clock he woke up with a start and a scream, glaring about him with terror-stricken eyes, just as he had done once before.

“Help!” he cried. “Help! He will murder me! Oh! villain, I know you now! I will remember—I will remember!” Here the terror went suddenly out of his eyes, and he looked about him in bewilderment.

“Mary! I remembered once more. Oh! I saw so clear—so clear!—and now I have forgotten again. This is the second time that I have seen in my dream the man who took my papers and my gold—the second time! Mary, if it comes again, I shall go mad. Oh! to be so near, and to have the villain in my grasp—and to let him go again! Mary, Mary—the loss of the money, and the dream, and your cousin David—all together—will drive me mad!”

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE CANVAS BAG.

THIS was truly an auspicious evening for me to present myself with my newly recovered bag. However, ignorant of the morning storm, I walked along, thinking how I would give the old man an agreeable surprise.

His room, when I called, about eight o'clock, was gloomy and dark, the windows closed and the blinds half down, though outside the sun was only just setting. Mr. Leighan was sitting still and rigid, brooding, I suppose, over David's terrible threats. His sharp face was paler, and his steel-blue eyes were keener and brighter than usual. He was thinking how he should meet this danger, and how he



could persuade or bribe or terrify David into submission and surrender of the papers; and there appeared no way.

"What do you want?" he cried, sharply. "What do you come here for? I am in no mood for idle prating."

"I am come on your business, Mr. Leighan, if you call that idle prating."

"My business? I don't remember that I ever had any business with you, Mr. Will Nethercote. I only have business with people who have money."

"True, and I have none for you to get hold of; neither land nor money, that is very true. Yet I am come on your business."

"Tell it, then, and leave me. Young man," he said, pitifully, "I am old now, and I am in grievous trouble, and I can not see my way out of it. Don't mind if I am a little impatient."

"I won't mind, Mr. Leighan. Meantime I have come to please you."

"You can't. Nothing can please me now, unless you can make me young and strong, and able to throttle a villain—that would please me."

"I can not do that. Yet I am sure that I shall please you."

"Go on, then; go on."

Then I began, with the solemnity with which one leads up to a dramatic situation.

"Six years ago, Mr. Leighan, you said that you had been robbed of a bag with twenty pounds in it."

"A bundle of papers and a bag with twenty sovereigns. I did. Good heavens! one man comes in the morning about the papers, and another in the evening about the money. Go on, go on—I can bear it all."

"There is nothing to bear, I assure you, Mr. Leighan," I said, a little nettled. "Come, it is all very well to be impatient, but there are bounds—"

"Go on; let me get it over."

"Was that bag of yours a brown canvas bag with your initials D. L. on it?"

"I thought so," he replied, strangely. "So you, too, are in the plot, are you? And you are come to tell me that I shall have the bag back without the money, are you? You in the plot? What have I ever done to you?"



"I have not the least idea what you mean. Who is in a plot? What plot?"

"George, I suppose, will appear next with another piece of his conspiracy. You are all in a tale."

"I think I had better finish what I have to say as quickly as possible. You are in a strange mood to-night, Mr. Leighan, with your plots and conspiracies—a very strange mood! Is this your bag?"

I produced it and gave it to him.

"Yes, it is the bag I lost. I never lost but one bag, so that this must be the one. As I said—the bag without the money. Well, I don't care. I have had greater misfortunes—much greater. You have come to tell me that the bag was put into your hands."

"Not at all. I found the bag; I found it on the top of Hamil Down, hidden beside the Gray Wether Stone."

"Very likely." He tossed the bag aside. "Why not there as well as any other place, when the money was once out of it?"

"But suppose the money was not taken out of it?"

He laughed incredulously.

"In short, Mr. Leighan, the money was not taken out of the bag. It was hidden away at the foot of the Gray Wether Stone, where I found it by the accident of poking my stick into the place where it lay. I heard the clink of the money, and I pulled it out; and here, Mr. Leighan, are your twenty sovereigns."

I took them from my pocket, and laid them on the table in a little pile. His long lean fingers closed over them, and he transferred them swiftly to his pocket without taking his eyes off my face, as if he feared that I might pounce upon the money.

"And what, young man, do you ask for your honesty in bringing me back my money?"

"Nothing."

"You might have kept it. I should have been none the wiser. You are rich, I suppose, or you would have kept it. Many young men would have kept it. Can I offer you a pound—yes, a pound!—for your honesty?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Leighan; I do not want a reward for common honesty. Besides, you must thank George Sidcote, not me. It was George who discovered that it was your money."



"As you please—as you please. In London you are so rich, I suppose, with your writing, that you can afford to throw away a pound well earned. As you please."

"Nobody ever believed that you were robbed, Mr. Leighan," I went on. "But the finding of the money seems to show that you really were robbed while you were insensible. Perhaps we shall find the papers, too, some day."

"Perhaps we shall," he said. "If they are in the hands of rogues and villains, I shall be much the better for it."

"At any rate, it shows that you did not give the money to anybody."

"Give the money! Will, you are a fool. Did you ever know me *give* money to anybody?"

"Certainly I never did."

"Well, then, enough said about my robbery. It is strange, too; both on the same day—" I knew not then what he meant. "Both on the same day—and after six long years. What can this mean?"

I can readily understand now, and by the light of all that we have learned, my extreme dullness in having such a clew and not being able to follow it up without hesitation. It was, of course, not the act of a common thief to steal a bag of gold and hide it away. And I had seen with my own eyes a man search for and find among the fallen stones of Grimspond a mysterious box, which he carried away stealthily. Yet I failed to connect David's box with Daniel's papers. To be sure, he had, so to speak, thrown me off the scent by speaking of his uncle's accident as having happened after his own departure. And I thought of the papers as in a bundle, not as in a box; and, besides, I had formed a strong theory as to the contents of the box.

Yet if there was one man in the place who owed Dan Leighan a grudge it was his nephew. That should have been remembered. But again, that David should find his uncle lying senseless in the road, and should rob him and go on his way without attempting to give him the least help, was not to be thought of; it was incredible.

It is, I believe, a fact that novelists can not invent any situation so wild and incredible but that real life will furnish one to rival and surpass it. In the same way, there is nothing in baseness, in cruelty, in selfishness, in revenge, that can be called impossible. For this is exactly what



David had done. The box which I saw him take from the fallen wall of Grimspond contained his uncle's bundle of papers; and the trouble that was hanging over this poor old man was the torture prepared for him, and already hanging over his head, of being slowly pillaged, and forced day by day to consent to new extortion.

"It seems as if the papers were stolen—now, doesn't it?" said Mr. Leighan. "I suppose you all thought I was drunk, and put them somewhere, and then fell off the pony? Yes; I've known all along that you thought that. Well, I was not drunk; I was as sober that night as I am to-night. I used to wonder who the robber was. Now I don't care to inquire; it is enough for me that I have been robbed, and that I am going to be robbed again."

"Why again, Mr. Leighan?"

"Never mind why. Will," he said, eagerly, "tell me—I never did any harm to you; you've never had any land to mortgage—tell me, do you know nothing of the papers? When you found this bag did you hear nothing about the papers?"

"I heard the wind singing in my ears, but it said nothing about any papers."

"Are you sure that you know nothing?" He peered into my face as if to read there some evidence of knowledge.

"I know nothing. How should I?"

"Well, it matters little; I am not concerned with the robber, but with the man who has them now. I must deal with him; and, there, you can not help me, unless—no—no—I can not ask it: you would not help me."

"Anyhow, Mr. Leighan, you've got your twenty pounds back again. That is something. Confess that you are pleased."

"Young man, if you torture a man all over with rheumatic pains, do you think he is pleased to find that they have left his little finger, while they are still like red-hot irons all over the rest of his body? That is my case."

"I am sorry to hear it. At the same time, twenty pounds, as I said before, is something."

"It's been lying idle for six years. Twenty pounds at compound interest—I don't spend my interest, I promise you—would now be six-and-twenty pounds. I've lost six pounds."

I laughed. A man who knows not the value of interest



laughs easily. I expect, therefore, to go on laughing all the days of my life.

"As for the papers, there's a dead loss of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Think of that! All these years I've waited and hoped—yes, I've prayed—actually *prayed*—though there is no form of supplication which meets my case—that I might get my papers back again. Three thousand pounds there are, among these papers, besides the certificates and things that I could replace. Nearly all Mary's fortune lost."

"No," I said. "Don't flatter yourself that you lost any of Mary's money. It was your own money. You are trustee for Mary's fortune, remember, and you will have to pay it over in full."

He winced and groaned.

"Three thousand pounds! With the interest it would now be worth nearly four thousand pounds at five per cent. And now all as good as lost!"

"Well, Mr. Leighan, I am sorry for you, very sorry, particularly as you will have to find that fortune of Mary's very soon."

"Shall I, Master Will Nethercote? I shall give Mary her fortune when I please; not at all, unless I please. Mary has got to be obedient and submissive to me, else she won't get anything. When I give my consent to her marriage, and not till then—not till *then*—I shall have to deliver up her fortune. Good-night to you, Will Nethercote."

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### DRINK ABOUT.

DURING these days David led the life of a solitary. He sometimes went to the inn, but only to get his bottle of whiskey filled; he went to the village shop on the green to buy what he wanted, and he kept wholly to himself. Except for that daily visit to Gratnor, he talked with no one.

From time to time I met him leaning over the field gates, loitering along the lanes, or sitting idly under the shade of one of our high hedges. I supposed that his loafing and wandering life had made work of any kind distasteful to him. But then he never had liked work. His face was not a pleasant one to gaze upon, and for a stranger would



have been terrifying. It was now, as regards expression, such a face as one might have met on Hounslow Heath or Shepherd's Bush in the last century, with a fierce "stand-and-deliver" look upon it—dogged, sullen, and discontented—the face of a man outside social law. He was sullen and discontented because he was always brooding over his wrongs; and dogged because he was pitilessly avenging them. At this time we knew from Mary that he went nearly every day to Gratnor, but we had no suspicion of what was said or done there. My own thoughts, indeed, were wholly occupied with the fortunes of George Sidcote, and I gave small heed to this sulky hermit. Yet had one thought about it, remembering how the man came home in rags, and now went clad in the garb of a respectable farmer, and denied himself nothing, one might have suspected something at least of the trouble which was hanging over the poor old man.

"David," I asked him, meeting him one day face to face so that he could not slip out of the way, "why do you never come over to Sidcote? Have we offended you in any way?"

"No," he replied, slowly, as if he was thinking what he ought to reply—"no; I don't know exactly that you have offended me."

"Then why not come sometimes?"

"Why not?" he repeated.

"Come over this evening and tell us what you think about doing."

"No. I don't think I can go over this evening."

"Well, then, to-morrow evening."

"No. I don't think I can go over to-morrow evening."

"Choose your own time, but come before I go back to London."

"When are you going back to London?"

"Next week."

"George will be turned out of his place before the end of the year. The old man told me so. Then he'll go too. Mary says she'll go with George. Then I shall be left alone with Uncle Dan." He laughed quietly. "I think I shall go and live at Gratnor, and take care of him. We shall have happy times together, when you are all gone and I am left alone with him."



“Why, David, you wouldn’t harm the poor old man now, would you?”

“Not harm him? not harm him? Did you ask him six years ago if he was going to harm me? Will he harm George Sidcote now?”

You can not force a man to be sociable, nor can you force him to entertain thoughts of charity, forgiveness, and long-suffering. I made no more attempts to lead the man back to better ways and the old habits.

The place where David lodged was a cottage made up by partitioning off a portion of the old farm-house of Berry; the other portion intended for another cottage, was without a tenant. The place stands among the dismantled farm-buildings, for Berry Farm is now worked with Gratnor. Around it was formerly the farm-yard, but the ducks and poultry, the pigs and cows, the dogs, the farm implements, and all the litter, mess, and noise of a farm, are gone now, and only the gates remain to show what formerly went on here. On the south side of the farm-yard there is a rill of clear spring-water running into a basin, and behind the rill rise the steep sides of Hayne Down. It is a quiet and secluded spot, with not a habitation of any kind within half a mile, and that only on one side. There are trees all round the place, and in the night a man living here alone would hear strange noises, and perhaps bring himself to see strange sights. But David, who had got rid of one ghost, had not yet, I believe, invented another. If one were sentimental, David might be portrayed alone in the cottage, sad, amid the pale ghosts of the past; he might be depicted sitting among the shadows of his childhood, before he took to drink and evil courses, recalling the long-lost scenes of innocence, listening once more to the voice of his dead mother. All this might be easily set down, but it could not be true: David had had enough of ghosts, and was not going out of his way to look for any new ones. There is no doubt a luxury in conjuring up a ghost of any one, but if you have had one with you against your will for six years you are not likely to want another when that one is laid.

One evening, toward the end of August, we had been walking with Mary on the Ridge till sunset drove us home. Then we left her at Gratnor, and walked back to Sidcote;



but as the night was cool and fine, we took the longer way, which lies over Hayne Down and passes through Berry farm-yard. Certainly we had no intention of prying into David's private habits, but they were forced upon our notice, and a very curious insight was afforded us of how he spent his evenings. It speaks volumes for a man when we find that his idea of a cheerful evening is a song and a glass with a festive company. I was once on board ship, sitting in the smoking saloon, when some one asked what we should all like for that evening. Some spoke untruthfully, some affectedly, some bashfully, some with an open-hearted candor which astonished. At last one man, a quiet person in the corner, said, "For my part, gentlemen, give me an evening with a party of Norfolk drovers." Ever since that evening I have ardently desired to spend an evening in such company, but I have not succeeded. If David had been there he would have replied that he should choose a company where the drink was unlimited and the songs were convivial.

It was not much past eight, and twilight still. It had been a hot day, and the evening was still warm, though not oppressive. David, however, had put up the green shutter which by day hung down outside the window, and he had closed the door. But in a cottage shutter there is always a lozenge-shaped hole at the top, and through this we perceived that there was a light in the room.

"David is at home," said George. "Shall we call upon him?"

Then—it was the most surprising thing I ever heard—there was suddenly a burst of applause from the room. Hands and fists banged the table, glasses rang, heels were drummed upon the floor, and there was the bawling of loud voices, as it seemed.

"Good heavens!" said George; "David has got a party."

We stopped, naturally, to listen.

Then a song began.

It was a drinking song, roared at the top of his voice by David himself. The song was one which I had never heard before, probably of American or Australian origin. As nearly as I can remember, the following were the words which we heard. But I may be wrong, and there were, perhaps, many more. The words are so sweet and tender,



and have about them so much of delicacy and refinement, that I am sorry there are no more:

“ Push the can about, boys,  
Turn and turn about, boys,  
Till the liquor's out, boys,  
Let the glasses clink.  
Every man is bound, boys,  
To sing his song around, boys,  
Till we all are drowned, boys,  
In the drink.  
Till we all are drowned, boys,  
In the drink.”

“ David is obliging the company,” I said. “ 'Tis a pleasing ditty, George.”

He sung, as I have said, as loudly as he possibly could bawl it, in a voice naturally ropy; and as his musical education had been neglected, and his ear was defective, the tune was the most dismal and doleful I had ever heard. But, no doubt, he took it to be convivial and soul-inspiring.

When he had finished there was another banging of tables, hollooming, and stamping on the floor.

“ Who can the company be?” asked George.

David began the song again, and repeated it half through. Then he left off suddenly and there was a dead silence.

We listened, waiting to hear more. There was a dead silence; not a sound.

“ What is the matter with them all?”

“ I believe they are all struck dumb,” said George.

The silence was complete.

“ I have it,” said George. “ I believe he is giving a party to himself in his own honor. He is all alone, and is having a convivial evening. It is very queer; makes one feel uncanny, doesn't it?”

This, indeed, was actually the case. Fancy holding a convivial meeting—a friendly lead—a harmonic evening—a free-and-easy—a singsong—all by yourself in a cottage half a mile from any other house, with the flowing bowl and glasses round, and three times three, and, no doubt, a doch and darroch to end with!

“ I think, George,” I said, “ that David must have gone very low indeed. He could not have got much lower. There must be a depth, at some point, where a sinking man meets with the solid rock.”



"Perhaps. The Lord keep us from beginning to sink! Will, do you think it possible, when that old man has taken my land, and I have gone wandering about the world, and have come home in rags, that I should ever sink like David—and drag Mary with me?"

"Nay, George; it is impossible."

Then the roisterer began again, his voice being now distinctly that of a man half drunk, from which we gathered that the interval of silence had been well employed:

"Every man is bound, boys,  
To sing his song around, boys;"

and then we went on our way. It seemed shameful even to listen.

And all the time, every day, this man who got drunk at night alone was carrying on, slowly and ruthlessly, the most systematic revenge, with the most exquisite tortures. Every day he went to Gratnor and dangled before his victim some of his property, and made him buy it back bit by bit, haggling over the bargain; letting his uncle have it one day cheap, so as to raise his spirits, and the next at nearly its full value, so as to crush him again; and even at times, after an hour's bargain over a single coupon, he would put it in the fire and destroy it.

When David went away, the poor old man would fall to weeping; this hard, dry old man, whom nothing ever moved before, would shed tears of impotent and bitter rage. But he refused to tell Mary what was troubling him.

"I can't tell you what it is," he said. "You don't know what the consequences might be if I told you. Oh, Mary, I am a miserable old man! I wish I was dead and buried, and that it was all over—I wish it was all over!"

There are many men who, when anything goes wrong with them, when Retribution—a very horrid specter—comes with cat-o'-nine tails to pay them out, or when Consequence—another very ruthless spirit—brings along disease, poverty, contempt, or other disaster, never fail to wish that they were dead and buried. It is a formula expressing considerable temporary vexation, but little more. For if the well-known skeleton were to take them at their word, and to invite them to take part with him in a certain festive procession and dance, they would make the greatest haste to excuse themselves, and to express their sincere regret



at having given Madame la Mort the trouble of calling upon them. "Another time, perhaps, if madame should be passing that way; but, indeed, there is no hurry; if madame will be so obliging as to— *Good-morning, madame. Again, a thousand pardons.*" Mr. Leighan, perhaps, was more sincere than most men, for he loved but one thing in the world, and this was being slowly taken from him bit by bit.

"It is something," said Mary, "to do with David. I will go and speak to him about it."

"No, Mary; no!" he cried, eagerly. "Mind your own business, child. Don't attempt to interfere. Oh! you don't know what might happen if you interfered."

"It is David, then. Very well, uncle, I shall not ask him what it is."

"I can't tell anybody, Mary; I must bear it in patience. If I resist I shall only lose the more. Mary, we've got to be very careful in the housekeeping now—very careful."

"I am always careful, uncle."

"There was a pudding again to-day. I can't afford any more puddings for a long while—not till Christmas. And I'm sure there's waste and riot in the kitchen."

"Nonsense, uncle! You not afford a pudding? Now, remember, you are not to be starved, and there's no waste or riot. Now I'll mix your brandy and water, and you can have your pipe, and go to sleep."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS.

I TERMINATED my holiday with a meddling and a muddling. Of course I was actuated by the best intentions. Every meddler and muddler is, otherwise he might be forgiven.

I was going back to town; it would be eleven months before I should get another holiday; long before that time Sidcote would be out of George's hands, and the pair would be married and gone. Was it possible to make an appeal to the old man? Could one touch him with the sense of gratitude? Could one make him feel that in his own interests he should not drive away the only living creature who stood between himself and the hired service of stran-



gers? Could one make him see that it would be far better for him to give the money to Mary than to David?

I made my attempt—needless to say, since it was meddling and muddling, with no success—on my last evening at Challacombe, when the old man had taken his tea, and might reasonably be expected to be milder than during the press of business in the morning.

I had not seen him for three weeks. Remember that for more than three weeks David had been pursuing his scheme of revenge. I was struck with the change that had come over him during this short period. It was that subtle change which we mean when we say that a man has “aged.” In Mr. Leighan’s case, his hands trembled, he looked feebler, and there was a loss of vitality in his eyes.

“What do you want?” he asked, impatiently. “You are come for Mary? Well, she isn’t here. You ought to know that she always goes out after tea. You will find her somewhere about—on the Ridge or down the lane, somewhere.” He turned his head and took up his pen again. I observed that he was poring over a paper of figures.

“No, Mr. Leighan; I came to see you.”

“What do you want with me? Money? No; you are one of the people who don’t want money. The last time you came you brought me my bag, with the twenty pounds in it. That was very little good, considering; but it was something. You haven’t got another bag of money, have you?”

“No; I have come to see you about George and Mary.”

“Go on, then. Say what you want to say. When a man is tied to his chair he is at the mercy of every one who comes to waste his time.”

This was encouraging. However, I spoke to him as eloquently as I could. I told him he ought to consider how Mary had been his housekeeper and his nurse for six long years, during which he had been helplessly confined to his chair. If he refused his consent to her marriage she would go away, not only from his house, but from the parish; he would be left in the hands of strangers, who would waste and spoil his substance. I thought that would move him.

“Young man,” he said, “I never asked for or expected any other service than what is paid for. Mary’s services



have been paid for. If she goes I shall find another person, who will be paid for her services."

"Nay," I replied, "you can not possibly rate Mary's services with those of a paid housekeeper. You will very soon find the difference. However, if that is your way of looking at the matter, I can say no more."

Then I spoke of George and of his mortgage. If Mr. Leighan gave his consent, no money would be lost, because Mary's fortune would pay off nearly the whole of the mortgage. And, besides, he would keep Mary near him, if not with him. A great deal more I said, which need not be set down.

"Young man," he said, when I concluded, "you are a writing person, and you speak as if you were writing for the newspaper which employs you. Business you know nothing of. But, young man, sentiment must not come in the way of business."

I exclaimed that it was not sentiment, but common sense, gratitude and good feeling.

"As for common sense, that belongs to business; as for gratitude, Mary has had her board and her bed, and she's done her work to earn her board and her bed; I don't see any call for gratitude there; as for good feeling, that's my business. Now, young man, George Sidcote's land is mortgaged. As he says he can no longer pay the interest, I have sent up the case to London and have got the usual order; he has six months in which to pay principal and interest. At the end of that time, because he can't and won't pay, his land will be mine. As for what is done afterward, I promise nothing."

"You will lose Mary, for one thing."

"I have told you that I, in that case, shall hire another person."

"Very well. You will have to pay Mary's fortune to her cousin David, because she will marry without your consent."

"Have the goodness, Mr. Will Nethercote, to leave me to my own affairs."

"This affair is mine as well as yours. Do you prefer David to Mary? You must choose between them, you know. I have read the will."

"Oh! you think you have got me between the two, do you?"



“I do.”

“Then perhaps you are wrong. And now go away, and meddle no more.”

Now I declare that in saying what I did say next I spoke without the least knowledge. It was a random shot.

“You think,” I said, “that David does not know of his aunt’s will. You hope that he will go away presently without finding out.” He started and changed color, and in his eyes I read the truth. He thought that David would never find out. “So, Mr. Leighan,” I went on, “that is in your mind. He lives alone, and speaks to no one; his aunt died after he went away; it is very possible that he does not know anything about it. Good heavens! Mr. Leighan, were you actually thinking to hide the thing from him, and so to rob him? Yes; to rob Mary first and David afterward of all this money?”

“What business is it of yours?” he asked

“Very good; *I shall tell David.*”

“Oh! if I were thirty instead of seventy, I would—” he began, his eyes flashing again with all their ancient fire.

“I shall go to David, Mr. Leighan. If, as I believe, he knows nothing about it, you will see how he will receive the news. Yes; you shall be between the two; you shall choose between David and Mary.”

Yes; I had stumbled on the exact truth as accidentally as I had stumbled on the canvas bag. David did not know, nor had his uncle chosen to inform him—though he was certain from his talk that he did not know—of his aunt’s will, deeply as it affected him. And I am now quite certain that the old man thought that David would not find out the truth before he went away again, and so he would keep the money to himself.

“Don’t tell him, Will,” said the old man, changing his tone. “Don’t interfere between David and me; it is dangerous. You don’t know what mischief you may be doing. Don’t tell him. As for George and Mary, I will arrange something. They shall go on at Sidcote as tenants on easy terms—on very easy terms. But don’t tell David. He is a very dangerous man. Don’t tell him.”

“I will not tell him anything, if you will give Mary your consent.”

“David will not stay here long. When he has gone—oh,



dear!—when he has got some more money he will go away. Don't tell him."

"You have to give that money either to Mary or to David. Choose!" I repeated.

"Who are you, I should like to know," he asked, with a feeble show of anger, "that you should come and interfere in family matters? What business is it of yours? Go away to London. Manage your own affairs—if you've got any. You are not my nephew."

"That is quite true. I am George's friend, however, and Mary's friend. I am going to do my best for both. Oh, Mr. Leighan, all your life long you have been scheming and plotting to get money and land. You think that you have laid your terms so as to turn George out of his land; and the prize looks vere nearly in your grasp. But David has come back; that alters the aspect of affairs. You can no longer refuse your consent and hold that money in pretended trust for a man you believed to be dead. You must hand it over to him—the whole of it. I do not know whether he can not force you to pay him back the interest upon it since it has been in your hands. You may be quite sure that he will extort from you the uttermost farthing. Well, you have the choice. Either give your consent to Mary or prepare to treat with David. Why, you have said yourself, business before sentiment. Here is business, indeed, before you. Trust yourself to the affection of your niece and the friendship of George, the truest man in the world, or else give yourself over to the deadly hatred of a man who desires nothing so much as to revenge himself upon you. Why, he has avowed it. He will do you—he says it openly—all the mischief he can."

"He is doing that already. And yet—don't tell him, Will—let us arrange something. George shall be my tenant. And when I die, I shall leave all my property to Mary—Foxworthy, Gratnor, Berry Down, and Sidcote. Think of that. She will be the richest woman in Challacombe."

"No," I replied. "Choose between Mary and David."

"I must have Sidcote," he said, with a kind of moan. The poor man had certainly aged very much in a few weeks. He clutched at the arms of his chair, his face twitched convulsively, and he spoke feebly. "I have lost



so much lately—I have suffered so horribly—you don't know how, young man, or you would pity me. I have been punished, perhaps, because I was too prosperous—you don't know how, and you can't guess. If I lose Sidcote, too, I shall die. You don't know, young gentleman—you don't know what it is to suffer as I have suffered!"

He looked so dejected and so miserable that I pitied him, grasping and avaricious as he had always been. The ransom of his coupons, day by day, had entered into his soul, though this I knew not at the time. And now I was going to take away the only consolation left to him—the prospect of getting Sidcote and of keeping Mary's fortune.

"I must have Sidcote," he said.

"Then I shall go at once to David and tell him."

"I must have Sidcote. Do your worst!" he cried, with some appearance of his old fire and energy. "Do your worst. Tell David what you please, and leave me to deal with David. I will—" He shook his head and pointed to the door.

Very well, I would go and tell David. As the event happened, I should, perhaps, have done better to have kept silence. But one could not tell beforehand what was going to happen.

In fact, I told David that very evening.

He was sitting at his table, a large open book before him, over which he was poring intently. The window was open, for it was a hot evening, and not yet sunset. A bottle of spirits stood on the table, with a tumbler and a jug of cold water, ready for drinking-time, which I gathered would shortly begin.

He looked up when he heard my step outside, and shut the book hurriedly.

"What do you want here?" he asked, roughly. "Why do you come prying after me?"

"Don't be a fool, David," I replied. "If you come outside, I will tell you why I came."

He hesitated a moment and then came out. Really, I think he looked more disreputable—that is to say, lower—than when he arrived in rags. A man may, perhaps, be in rags, and yet not be disreputable: he may wear them picturesquely, he may even wear them with dignity. Not that David was either picturesque or dignified on his arrival. Yet he looked better, somehow, than now, when he had



been at home a month. Strong drink and plenty of it, the satisfying of revenge and hatred, the want of work and exercise, had already written their evil marks upon his countenance, which was bloated and evil-looking.

"Upon my word, David," I said, "one would think we were old enemies instead of old friends."

"Speak up, then," he replied, his eyes suspicious and watchful, as if I was trying to get into his cottage and steal something. "Speak up; let a man know your business. If you had no business you would not come here, I take it."

"It is business that may concern you very deeply," I said. And then I told him.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I suppose you mean honest, else why should you tell me? Perhaps you've got a score against the old man, too."

"Not I, David. I am not his debtor!"

"He never told me. He might have told me a dozen times." David sat on a boulder and began to turn the thing over. "This wants thinking of, this does. So the old woman had six thousand, had she? She began with one, and Mary's mother had one—a thousand each; and my father had Berry Down, and Uncle Daniel he had Gratnor. She lived with him, and he told her what to do with her money; so in forty years she made six thousand of it; and Mary is to have it if she marries with her uncle's consent—and if she doesn't, I'm to have it."

"That is exactly the state of the case."

"If Mary marries George without the old man's consent," he repeated, "he'll have to give me all that money—six thousand pounds."

"Mary will marry George with or without her uncle's consent; I can tell you that beforehand. She will marry him within a very few weeks."

"Nay," he said; "rather than give me the money he'd let her marry the blacksmith."

"Well; I have told you."

"Why," he said, "rather than give me the money he'd let her marry the devil."

At this point I came away, for fear he might try even to get beyond that possibility; and the mess I had almost made of the whole business proves, as I said before, that there is no excuse whatever for the best intentions.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## DAVID MAKES A PROPOSAL.

"QUICK, David, quick!" cried the old man eagerly. "Let us get to work. Oh! you waste half the morning; let us get on. At this rate," he sighed, "we shall take months before I have got back the property."

"There will be no trade this morning, uncle," David replied, standing in the door-way. It was a week after I had told him the truth. He had been turning it over in his mind in the interval.

"Why not? David, if you were nearly seventy you would be anxious to get on; you would not shilly-shally over a single bit of paper. Let us get on, David. Oh! you've got all the power now, and I am in your hands. I won't grumble, David. No; take your own time, my boy; take your own time."

The poor old man was strangely altered in four or five weeks, that he should thus humble himself before his nephew. But David had all the power so long as he had any of those coupons left.

"We go so slowly, David; and I am so old."

David sat down with great deliberation, and as if he meant to stay a long time. But he had not with him his book of coupons.

"Surely not too slow for you, uncle. Why, you are a patient man, if ever there was one. How many years did you wait, laying your lines to catch me and my land? No one can go too slow for you if he only keeps moving in the right direction. How many years have you lain low for George Sidcote? No—no; not too slow for you."

"I'm an old man now, David. Let me have done with the business at once."

"Not too slow for me," David went on; "why, I can wait ten years. It is such a treat, you see, for me to be selling you your own property, and to watch you buying it, that I could go on forever. I really could." I think that he spoke the truth here, for the man was implacable and pitiless, and enjoyed every day more and more the spectacle of his uncle lying at his feet begging for mercy.



If any gleam of pity softened his soul, the sight of the fields which had once been his hardened it again.

"You little thought when I came home that I was going to give you so much trouble, did you, Uncle Daniel? You thought you had the whip-hand over me always, didn't you? But you see: first the fall from your pony, then the loss of your papers, then the stroke, then my coming home and finding those papers—all part of the judgment!—and now there's more to follow."

"What more? Oh, David! what more?" the helpless old man only groaned.

Think of it. Outside, the splendid sun of August lay over the hills and combes, the woods and fields: the place was the most rural spot in all England, the furthest removed from the haunts of men and the vices of cities; in the next room was the most innocent girl in the world; close by was the little hamlet of Watercourt, where the people might be rude, and perhaps unwashed, but were yet full of the simple virtues which linger among country folk. And here, in this room, in an atmosphere of age and weakness, the fire burning in midsummer, the windows closed, were an old man, paralyzed and near his end, yet plotting and planning for the money he could never use, and a young man playing upon him a scheme of revenge worthy of the good old days when a king thought nothing of pulling out a Jew's teeth one by one until he parted with his coin.

"To-day, uncle, I have come to talk about my aunt's will."

"Then he told you? He said he would."

"Will Nethercote told me: you did not. You thought that as soon as our little business was finished I should go away and never come back any more. You thought you would keep the money, did you? Not so, uncle; not so!"

"He told you, did he? I wish I could be even with Will for that."

"You can't, you know, because he has got no land; and so you can't lay any plots and plans for him."

"I thought you would never find it out, David," Mr. Leighan confessed, with somewhat surprising candor. "I soon found that you knew nothing about it, and that you never go about and talk; and I was pretty certain that you would never find out. Well, now you know, what difference does it make? You are no nearer the money."



"We shall see. My aunt might just as well have left it to me as to you. To be sure, I never thought she had half so much. She began with a thousand. She must have pinched and saved."

"She was a wise and a thrifty woman, and she understood, with my help, how to place her money to the best advantage. She ought to have left it all to me, because I made it for her. She always said she would. But there—you can never trust a woman in a matter of real importance. And, besides, she was two years younger than me, and thought to outlive me. Well, well!"

"She left it to Mary, on the condition of her marrying with your consent; and, if not, the money was to go to me. And if I was dead—and you pretended to think I was dead—the will said nothing. So you thought you could stick to the money. Uncle, you're a foxy one! You ought to be in the States, and thirty years younger. There you would find yourself at home, with plenty of opportunity. Well, I am wiser now than I was. And see now, uncle, I don't mean to go away until this question is settled. What are you going to do?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Keep it to yourself, then. I will tell you what you thought you were going to do. I've worked it all out. First, if you let George and Mary get married before the law lets you take Sidcote, you will lose Sidcote." He began, in his slow way, to tick off his points upon his fingers. "That's first thing. After you have got Sidcote, you will be still loath to let the money go, and you will keep Mary waiting on. You think that I shall soon go. Then you will keep the money as long as you live. But suppose they were to marry without your consent, all the money comes to me—comes to me. Very well, then; comes to me. That sticks, doesn't it? You can let them marry now—and you will lose Sidcote; you can let them marry after you have got Sidcote; and you will have to pay up; if you keep on refusing your consent, you can keep the money as long as you like—unless they marry without. Then you've got to give it to me—to me, uncle. You've had a taste of me already."

He waited a little. His uncle said nothing, but watched him from under his long white eyebrows—not contemptu-



ously, as on the first interview after his return, but with the respect due to the strength of the situation.

"Very well, then; you would rather give that money to Mary than to me. But you would like to get Sidcote; you hate the thought of giving it to me, you intended to keep it yourself. Yet there is no way out of it if you want Sidcote. Perhaps you think you would give it to Mary, after you have got Sidcote. But suppose she marries before? then you would be obliged to give it all to me. See here"—he put the dilemma once more as if to make it quite clear to himself, as well as to his uncle—"if you give your consent now, you lose Sidcote; if you give it after you have got Sidcote, you will have to pay Mary all her fortune; if they marry without your consent, you will have to pay me all the money. Perhaps Mary will go on all your life waiting for consent; perhaps I shall go away; perhaps she will marry without your consent. Which would you like best?"

"Go on, David; perhaps you are going to propose something."

"I have been thinking things over, uncle. You are getting old, you may die any day; then Mary would be free. It is true that she might marry to-morrow, in which case I should be entitled to everything. But I don't think she would be such a fool. If I were Mary, I should wait. You are seventy now, and you've lost the use of your legs. You can't last very long. I should wait, if I was Mary. Yes; it might be a year or two; it couldn't be longer."

His uncle heard without any emotion this argument in favor of his approaching demise—country people use plainness of speech about such matters—but he felt himself very far from dying, as masterful men always do up to the very end.

"Well, David, supposing that what you say is common sense, what next? If Mary marries at once she is a fool, and then I have you to reckon with. There is a good bit outstanding on the old account, and I don't suppose there would be much coming to you when compound interest and all comes to be reckoned up."

"As for your outstanding accounts, we shall see when the time comes. And as for compound interest, it will be for you to pay that on my aunt's six thousand pounds."

"The interest went for the keep of Mary."

"I haven't heard that there's a word about that in the



will. You've had her services as housekeeper for five years, and you've pocketed the interest. Why, I take it that you made five per cent. That's three hundred a year. There will be a beautiful day of reckoning, uncle. The sale of your coupons is nothing to it."

"You were going to make a proposal, David?"

"Not a proposal—not exactly an offer. What do you say to this, uncle? Mary won't be such a fool as to marry yet. If she doesn't you've only got to keep on refusing your consent, and then she must either marry without or not marry at all—"

"David, it's a terrible misfortune that you are come back," his uncle interrupted.

"It is—to you. Well, she must either marry without your consent or not marry at all as long as you live. You will live a year or two longer. Then you will die, and she will have the whole of it. That is so, isn't it?"

"Go on."

"Buy me off, old man."

"Always buy—always buy!"

"To be sure. You've got to buy your own property back, because I've come home. You've got to buy me out on the chance of the money coming to me. Please yourself. What do you say to buying me out at a thousand?"

"A thousand pounds!"

"Yes, Uncle Daniel; a thousand pounds. And a very moderate figure too. Consider: if they were to get married, you'll make five thousand by the bargain, not to speak of interest. If they don't, you'll have the satisfaction of giving your nephew a thousand pounds back out of the property you've robbed him of."

"A thousand pounds!"

"That is the figure, uncle. Is it a deal?"

"I'll think of it, David. A thousand pounds! I'll think it over."

Said I not that persons with the best intentions can never be forgiven? Here were matters worse than ever: the old man's heart hardened the more; his cupidity awakened; and David with a deeper treachery in his mind to take revenge upon his uncle. And all my fault!



## CHAPTER XVII.

## A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

ONE has had to say so many hard things of the unfortunate David, and he appears in so singularly unattractive a light, that it is pleasant, before one parts with him altogether, to record one occasion on which he showed a gleam of a better self surviving the degradation of six years. In fact, David had not reached that lowest of all levels, that solid rock, that hard pan, which is, in fact, the Earthly Hell. Doubt not that it exists, though perhaps we look for it in vain among the rags and tatters of the direst poverty. It is not there that we shall find it. In this dismal stratum the men and women live wholly for themselves, and fight and grab, and waste and devour, intent only on getting all that there is to be had, each for himself, of roasted meats and strong drink, and the pleasures which are symbolized by these. It is a land of Purity—of Pure Selfishness, that is—unmixed and unabashed. Perhaps David sojourned awhile in that country during the mysterious period when he tramped, ambled, trampled, roamed, wandered, and vagabondized somewhere across the great continent of North America. He came out of it, I think, when he left California, after a series of adventures which would have done credit to a freebooter or a filibuster; but concerning which we had glimpses only all too short for the natural curiosity of man.

He came home with those six years of wandering upon his back; every year adding its contribution to the great bundle of debasement which he carried. Pilgrim Christian's burden, though it does not appear to have grown smaller between the time when he began to groan under it until the time when he cast it off, is not recorded to have grown bigger. David's, alas! grew bigger every day. Unhappily, too, he was as unconscious of his burden as if it had been a hump. He came home debased; he was below the level of the honest laborers once his servants; and he was possessed by the Evil Spirit of Hatred, which filled him always and all day long with thoughts of revenge, pitiless and cruel. And yet he had not fallen quite into the Earth-



ly Hell. It was Mary who found this out. I suppose it was only to be expected, if anybody should discover a weak spot in a man's Whole Armor of Selfishness, that it should be such a girl.

She went to plead with him for her uncle. He was in the deserted farm-yard of Berry, with its tumble-down buildings. He leaned against the gate, a pipe in his mouth, thinking always of the fields he had lost, and the way in which they had been taken from him. It is unwholesome for a man to sit in the place which had been his, and to be brooding day after day upon how he lost it. Boabdil had few days of joy left to him, I dare say, after he rode away from Granada; but his mild sorrow and the resignation of his latter years would have been turned to madness had he continued to live within the walls of the city, and marked, day by day, the insolence and triumph of his conquerors.

While David looked before him, thinking of the past, and carefully forgetting all his own share in his ruin, as was his wont, and fanning the fierce flames of resentment within him, as was also his wont, he became aware that his cousin Mary was coming up the lane. Of course his first thought was to get out of her way; but as he thought slowly, and Mary walked quickly, there was no time to carry that idea into effect.

"Don't run away, David," she said; "I came to talk with you."

"Well," knocking the ashes out of his pipe, which was done, "come through the gate then, Mary. Will you talk in the cottage, or will you talk here?"

"Let us stay outside—here in the shade, David. Do you guess what I have come to say?"

"I might guess," he replied, slowly; "on the other hand, again, I might not. Better say it, Mary."

"It is this, cousin. When will you cease to worry your uncle?"

"Did he tell you that I worry him? Has he been complaining?"

"No. He even denies that you have any share in the new trouble that seems to have fallen upon him. But I know that it is caused by you. After every one of your morning visits he is miserable. Every day he grows more nervous and more irritable. He sheds tears when he is



alone—I have seen him, David. I am quite sure that you are the cause of his trouble.”

“Well, Mary, perhaps you are right. I may be the cause of it. Perhaps I may be the cause of a good deal more trouble before I have done.”

“Oh! David, think—he is an old man; he is afflicted with paralysis; you are hastening his end. What good will it do to you if you worry him into his grave? Will that restore the past? Will that make you what you used to be?”

“Nay, that it will not do. But when I see him at my mercy, crying for pity, I think of the day when I came to ask him to lend me a poor fifty pounds, with which to try my luck in Canada, and he laughed me in the face.”

“Well, then, David, does it do you any good to remember that day?”

“Yes”—he added a great oath, meaning that it did him an extraordinary amount of good to remember that day.

“I can not believe that. Let the past be dead, David, and live for the future.”

“You don’t know what you are saying, Mary. What should you know about it? You are only a girl”—he spoke roughly and rudely, but not unkindly—“what do you know? Let the past be dead? Why, all the world is crying because the past won’t die. I only wish the past would die.” Here, it seems to me, David hit upon a profound truth: for very nearly all the world—not quite—it would be, unhappily, far better if the past would die.

“Resolve that it shall die, David, and live for better things.”

“If the past should die,” he said, slowly, leaning one arm over the gate—“if the past should die, Mary, I should forget that I was once a substantial man, who sat respected at the market ordinary, rode my own horse, and farmed my own land. I should forget that I had to go away from my native place, and take ship with the lowest emigrants. I should forget—Mary,” he whispered, “I can trust you—I have told no one else—I should forget that I had been in prison—yes, in prison—”

“David!” She shrunk from him, but recovered, and laid her hand softly upon his.

“Yes; in prison. And now I am no longer fit to sit



and talk with George and you. But I am fit to talk with my uncle, because, bad as I am, he is worse."

"But if he is, David, if he is, forgive him."

"Never!" Again he swore a great oath, almost as great as that of the Norman king. "I will never forgive him or forget him. Such as I am now, he made me. Mary, don't ask me to forgive him. He had no mercy upon me, and I will have none upon him."

"When it is all over, David, and your uncle is dead, will it please you to think of your revenge?"

"Yes, it will; I shall always be pleased to think that I could pay back something—I don't care how much—of what he made me suffer. Look at me, Mary, and remember what I was. Do you think I can not remember too?"

"Oh, David! But to keep alive such a spirit of revenge!"

"Wait, Mary; he has got George in his grip now. Wait; if George goes away and wanders about like me, and takes to drink and bad companions, and comes back to you in rags, with the past that won't die—and a prison, may be—would you ever forgive your uncle for sending him away?"

"God forbid that I should be so tempted!" said the girl, shuddering.

"You don't know what may happen, therefore don't come to me about my uncle. Why, cousin, if you only knew what is in his mind about you this minute, you would say 'Stick to him, David; worry him like a terrier with a rat—squeeze the life out of him!' That is what you would say, Mary."

"No! Whatever is in his mind, I could not say that; I believe that I could not even think it."

"Why, you have been his housekeeper and his servant for five long years, without any wages—"

"No, I have kept my fowls," said Mary.

"And you've looked after the old man as no other woman in the world would have done; you've borne with his bad temper and his miserly habits, and now his reward is to rob your lover of his land and to cheat you out of your fortune. Yet you want me to spare him!"

Great passions are commonly supposed to belong exclusively to great men. A Louis Quatorze is so great and grand that he consigns a Fouquet to a lifelong prison, and condemns the man with the Iron Mask to be doomed to ob-



livion utter. A Louis Onze, another great king, keeps an enemy long years in a cage in which he can not stand upright. There are many noble and spirit-stirring stories of the implacable hatred and wrath of kings and nobles, and some of the gods of Olympus. But that a rough and common man, degraded by his own vices, fallen from his own respectable condition, should entertain such an implacable passion of revenge—that seems, indeed, remarkable.

“I will worry him,” said David, “as long as I can. I will never spare him. I’ve got another— But never mind. Oh! when you are gone, Mary, he shall have a life that he little dreams of now!”

“David! It is terrible. Can nothing move you?”

“Nothing, Mary; not even you. And mind you, don’t try to put yourself between him and me, because he won’t stand it. It isn’t me that won’t stand it, because I don’t greatly care who knows; but it’s him. He likes me to come; he watches for me and waits for me, though he knows that when I am gone he will turn and wriggle in his chair, and cry and curse. Yet he wants me back. Say no more about it, Mary.”

It was indeed useless to try further persuasions. Mary was silent. Her cousin, worked up by his wrath, stood before her with purple cheeks and flaming eyes.

“I must go away soon,” she said. “I can not let George go out into the world without any one. And then I must leave him—alone.”

“Yes; but he will have *me*,” said David, grimly.

“Well, I have said what I came to say, David, and I have done no good. If you would only forget.”

“I can not forget. Stay, Mary: one thing I must say. Remember afterward that I said it in time. Then, perhaps, you’ll think that if it hadn’t been for him I might have been a different man.”

“What is it, David?”

“It is this.” His face softened the moment he ceased to think upon his wrongs. It was but the wreck of a face which had once been handsome and full of hope; but it was better and healthier to look upon than the face black with revenge. “Will tells me that you are going to marry George without your uncle’s consent?”

“Yes.”



“You know that he must then give me the whole of my aunt’s money.”

“Yes.”

“Very well, Mary. I am fooling him. Never mind how. But you shall not be wronged. You shall have all your fortune. Marry George without any fear. Remember—you shall not be wronged! I am as bad as you like, but I will not rob you, Mary, I will not rob you!”

Said I not that David had not sunk to the lowest level of the Earthly Heli? For that one promise of his, that he would not wrong the girl, I forgive him all the rest.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

PERHAPS the chief advantage of being a journalist is that you are expected to write upon every conceivable subject, and must, consequently, whether you are a person of curiosity and ardent in research or not, be continually acquiring new knowledge, and always storing up freshly acquired facts. No one, therefore, is so wise as an aged journalist—the older the wiser—until there comes a time when his memory begins to fail. After that he can sit at the dinner-table and talk as ignorantly as his neighbors.

As for me, I am every day hunting up something or other to illustrate and explain the startling telegram which never fails to arrive once a day. I have traveled—in a library—with this object over the whole face of the habitable globe. I think I know every island in the Pacific and every other ocean, its discovery, its early and its later history. The whole course of human history is at my fingers’ ends, because I know exactly what volumes, on what shelves, contain what I want. The whole circle of the sciences is known to me—that is to say, I know where to look for a popular account of each, and where to find illustrations and anecdotes. The social life of every country is familiar to me, from the court to the cottage, because I know where the books about it can be found; in fact, I am the Admirable Crichton of the day.

I would not proclaim my own virtues so loudly were it not that, first, we do not get the credit due to us—the novelists, poets, and dramatists running off with all the glory;



and, secondly, that it was entirely due to my professional versatility that the Reign of Terror which King David had established at Gratnor was swept aside, and King David himself dethroned, and this, too, in a most surprising and unexpected manner. One would not, at first sight, be inclined to connect the fortunes of Mary Nethercote with the Royal Geographical Society. Yet—but you shall hear.

It was heard in the office of the paper which has been fortunate enough to secure my services that there was to be held a special meeting, on an evening early in October, of the Royal Geographical Society, in order to hear a paper read by a German traveler recently arrived in Europe, after a lengthened stay in the South Sea Islands. Reader, you have perused the first two chapters of this history, and with your unerring sagacity you divine the rest. Nevertheless, I will tell it in order, though more briefly than if you had not already partly anticipated the reading of that paper.

I was instructed to write a leading article upon this paper. The inexperienced person would have procured a ticket; attended the meeting, made notes, and rushed away at ten o'clock in order to write his article before midnight. For myself I employed means which it is not necessary to describe—though, perhaps, they were immoral—in order to procure a private view of that paper before it was read in public. Consequently, with the help of a certain work of which I knew, and the presence of the map to keep one from going geographically or longitudinally wrong, I produced a leading article which gratified my chief and pleased the public. The paper read before the Society was on the people, the resources, and the natural history of that interesting island called New Ireland, of which I had never heard before. I took the precaution, after writing it, of attending the meeting; not that I wanted to hear the paper and the discussion, because I hate papers and discussions, but because I wished to be certain that the meeting really came off, and to be able to add any little detail as to the proceedings. A dreadful thing once happened to an unhappy critic who described a concert *from the programme alone*, without going to hear it. Most unhappily, he permitted himself to make certain strictures upon the performers. I say most unhappily, because—a thing he could never have foreseen—that concert was at



the last moment unavoidably postponed, an accident which led to his connection with the paper being severed. Therefore I repaired to the theater of the London University and took a back seat high up in order to witness the proceedings. I do not remember to have heard it observed by any one, but it is a remarkable fact that if you sit high up and look down upon the heads of the attendant Fellows of the Geographical Society beneath, you become presently aware that they have all gone bald at the top—not, I believe, so much from age as from a geographical sympathy with the North Pole.

At the hour of eight the chairman entered with his captive traveler. The latter, certainly one of the tallest and finest men I have ever beheld, took his place in front of his maps, and began, after the usual introduction, to read his paper.

Of course I knew it all beforehand, and could look, like the governess who takes the girls to a lecture on astronomy, as if that and all other sciences were equally familiar to me; yet it was more interesting spoken by this tall German—his name was Baron Sergius von Holsten—than read from the proofs. He spoke very good English, and as he went on added many new details to those he had originally set down. He had lived, it seemed, for many years among the natives of New Ireland, although they are cannibals and of great ferocity. In order to qualify for this dangerous enterprise he had first learned their language. Then he had himself conveyed to the shores, won the confidence of the people by some skill or secret knowledge, and stayed until he had acquired all the information upon them and upon their island that could be obtained. And he had the good luck to be taken off at last in safety by a ship that touched upon these inhospitable shores.

After this paper was read, the usual irrepressible persons got up and began to discuss. At this point I retired to add a few things to my article and hand it in. I then repaired to the Savage Club, which at eleven o'clock begins to be a cheerful place. Here I found, in fact, an animated circle, and among them my friend of the R.G.S., the Baron Sergius von Holsten, who had been brought by one of the members.

It is always interesting to meet with men who have been on desert islands, or lived among cannibals, or traveled in



those regions—now so few—where Messrs. Cook & Sons have no agents, and there are no hotels. It is enough for some people only to gaze upon such a man. For our part, at the Savage, we found the baron not only an interesting person and as well informed as a leader writer, but also a singularly amusing companion, and brimful of anecdotes and stories of all kinds, which he seemed delighted to produce for our benefit. He took his tobacco very kindly, and had a quite pathetic affection—seeing how long he must have been deprived of it—for whisky and Apollinaris. Perhaps, however, he wished to emphasize the *entente cordiale* between Great Britain and Germany by blending the two most important drinks produced in the two countries.

We talked till late. At about three in the morning, when we had gone half round the world with him, and the waiter had brought the baron his twelfth tumbler—a man so big had surely the right to fill up three times to any other man's once—he told us a very singular and surprising story.

He had not been the only European on the island all the time, he said. For six months or so he had a companion in the shape of a poor devil—an Englishman—who had been washed ashore upon a piece of timber, the only one, so far as he knew, who survived the wreck of the ship. The natives were going to spear this human jetsam, when he interfered and saved him, and continued to protect him until he was able to get him off the island in a vessel which came a-blackbirding. "This fellow," said the baron, "was the most intolerable creature in existence. Earlier in his existence he had committed a murder, and during the whole of his stay on the island he was suffering agonies of remorse; all day long he wept and groaned, and was afraid to leave me for fear of being speared—in fact, the young men took a pleasure in pretending to point their spears at him, observing the intensity of his terror. At night he would not sleep at a distance of more than a foot or so from me for fear. And he was always visited every night by the ghost of the respectable uncle whom he had slain."

"Did you see the ghost?"

"No, nor did I hear its voice. Yet it spent the best part of the night in abusing the poor man, and he in answering it with prayers and protestations. As for revenge,



I suppose no other murdered man ever took so much out of his murderer. Well, it was tedious. At length my Englishman declared that he desired nothing so much as to get away from the island, and give himself up to justice. If he could only make his way to Australia and then get a passage to England, he would give himself up and confess the whole truth."

"A lively companion!"

"Yes. But to look at him you would think him a dull, heavy fellow, who seemed to have no spirit for such a desperate deed. Well, I got him away at length, and was left happy at last and alone. Before he went, however, I wrote down, at his request, a statement of the murder; a confession, in fact, which he and I witnessed. I warned him that I should make any use of it that I thought fit. As yet I have done nothing with it; and as I dare say he is dead by this time, I do not see why I should not tear it up. Here it is, however, written in my old note-book."

He took it out of his pocket—a thick leather note-book, stuffed full of the notes which he had made during his residence in the place—and began to read:

"'I, David Leighan, farmer, of the parish of Challacombe by the Moor—'"

"Halloo!" I cried, "I know that man. There is only one David Leighan, and only one Challacombe."

"Has he kept his promise and come home?"

"Yes. He came home three months ago."

"So. He is doubtless hanged by this time?"

"Why should he be hanged?"

"For the murder which he confessed in this document. He was to give himself up to the police, and confess and take the consequences."

"But he has not murdered any one; at least, he has not confessed."

"He murdered his uncle, one Daniel Leighan, of the same parish. If he has not confessed, I must put these papers in the hands of justice."

"Why, his uncle is alive still! What could he mean by confessing?"

"Then David must have been mad. In which case it seems a pity that I took so much trouble to save him from the stewpans. But here is his confession, and if it is a



work of fiction, all I can say is that David is master of that art."

"May I read the confession?"

He handed me the note-book, and I read it through. You, gentle reader, have already had that advantage.

When I had read the paper through I understood everything. I understood why he came to the church-yard in order to see the grave of his victim; why he was so careless about his rags; why he was seized with that queer hysterical fit; why he was so moody and sullen; what it was that he took out of the hiding-place at Grimspound; what he was doing with the old man. Everything became clear; and one thing clearer than any other—that his uncle must be saved from him.

"Herr Baron," I said, "I must take you, if you please, all the way from London to Challacombe by the Moor. You must stand before David with this document in your hand, and prove that he is a murderer in intent and a robber in fact."

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE LAST APPEAL.

WHEN the harvest was over—it is later up among the hills than in the lowlands below—and the grain was ingathered, and the work of the year completed, George began to make his arrangements. He had received the formal notice and a six months' grace in which to find the money. There was no longer any doubt possible that he must leave Sidcote. He had now made it all out in his own mind. There would be enough money from the harvest to pay the half-year's interest; the land would be foreclosed. And the sale of his stock, farm implements, furniture, and everything would leave him with a few hundreds to begin the world again. He would go to Tasmania; it seemed, from the books he read, the kind of country where a man might buy a small farm, and live upon the fruit of his own labor.

"Let us," said Mary, "make one last appeal to my uncle. We will go together, George. Perhaps he may relent even at the last."



They made that appeal at an unfortunate time. To begin with, it was in the morning, when David was still with his uncle; and in the second place, it was a morning when David had been abusing his position. The redemption value of the coupons, in fact, was at a preposterous figure, and the poor old man, torn by the desire to get back his property and by rage at the terrible ransom imposed upon it, was rapidly arriving at the condition in which his nephew loved to see him, when he lost his self-command, and in turns groveled, wept, protested, implored, cursed, and tried to bribe his nephew. It is well to draw a veil over this picture of sordid and ignoble revenge; of old age dragged in the dust of self-abasement; of baffled avarice and of ruthless malice. There had been a battle royal, and David, as usual, was the victor. No mere physical suffering would have caused Daniel Leighan more cruel torture than this daily bargain over his own property; no mediæval poet could have invented a more crafty and complete revenge. And outside, Arcady with its hanging woods glorious in the autumn sun, its streams hurrying downward under the trailing branches, with the red and yellow leaves of the bramble, and the scarlet berries of the mountain-ash, and the calm, silent mountains of Hey Tor and Blackdown across the combe; the peaceful farm-yard, with the familiar sounds of contented creatures enjoying life; the dog sleeping before the kennel, and the cat sleeping in the sun-warmed porch, and the water of the leet musically dropping, dropping forever, over the great wheel. In sweet Arcady man's evil passions should be stilled, otherwise the joy and gladness of Arcady are banished, and it ceases to be that sweet and happy land.

When they opened the door they found the old man trembling and shaking with the passions of impotence and rage. His face, livid and distorted, with haggard eyes, was turned upward in an agony of entreaty, to meet David's. There was no passion in that face, nor any emotion except a calm and sober satisfaction, which might even have been holy gratitude, for David's heavy face was hard to read. He stood over his uncle's chair, dominating him, with a bundle of papers in his hand, regardless alike of prayers or imprecations.

"Wait a minute, George," he said. "We have just finished our business, and a most pleasant half-hour we



have spent, to be sure. Now, uncle—it is always pleasant, as everybody knows, to do business with my uncle—steady, I say, or you will have a fit—now, is it a deal, or shall I put this little packet into the fire? Quick! take it or leave it. That's my figure!"

"I'll take it—oh! I'll take it!"

David laid the papers on the table instantly, and made a note in a pocket-book.

"Pity," he said, "that you would not come to terms sooner. You'd have spared yourself a great deal of trouble and time. But there, you always would have your way, and you enjoy beating a man down, don't you?" His uncle did not look exactly as if he had enjoyed the last attempt. "Now I've done, George."

Although he had finished his business, David did not retire, but took a seat—Mary's seat—in the window, prepared to listen, and with the appearance of one interested in what was coming.

"What do you want, George?" Mr. Leighan asked, impatiently. "Why do you come here while I am busy, Mary? I'm not so strong as I was, and David made me angry. Wait a moment. David said something that angered me. Wait a moment. He doesn't mean to anger me—no—no—but he does, sometimes."

He covered his face with his hands. Presently the trembling left him, and he recovered.

"Now," he said, with a show of briskness, "I am better again. What is it, George? If it is business, have you come to propose anything? You have got your legal notice, I believe? Yes. Then you know the conditions of the law, which I didn't make. It is the same for me as for you. Pay me any other way, and keep your land. If no other way, I shall have your land. Is that sense, or is it not?"

"Hard common-sense," said George.

"So it is," said David. "It's always hard common-sense when he takes another man's land."

"Well, uncle, I have got nothing to say on that score."

"I am sorry for you, George," the old man went on; yet his face expressed a certain satisfaction. "Nobody will blame you, I'm sure; or me either, for that matter; and when your poor father borrowed the money the land was worth three times as much as it is now, so that nobody will



blame him. Take a glass of brandy and water, George. I don't expect ever to get the value of my money back. So we're all losers by the hard times."

"He never offered me any brandy and water," said David. But no one took any notice of the remark, which showed jealousy.

"I shall want a tenant, George," the old man went on, "and we will not quarrel about the rent. Easy terms you shall have—oh! I shall not be hard with your father's son—and when you've got your head well above water again, we will consider about you and Mary. Don't think I shall be hard upon you."

"No," said George; "I am going to emigrate."

"To foreign lands, George? to foreign lands? Has it come to that? Dear—dear!" Mr. Leighan belonged to the generation which regarded emigration as the worst and last of evils.

"I am going to Tasmania."

"Tut, tut; this is very bad. To foreign lands! David went to foreign lands, and see how he came home. George, you had better stay at Sidcote and be my tenant."

"No," said George, shortly. "Well; the long and the short of it is, that we are here to-day—Mary and I—to ask your consent to our marriage."

"No, George; I shall not consent. What! let Mary marry a man who has lost his own land and is going to foreign lands? Certainly not! not on any account!"

"When your sister left Mary all her fortune—"

"It was mine by rights. I made it for her."

"—She put in the clause about your consent to protect her. You know, as well as I, that she herself would never object to me for Mary's husband."

"She began with a thousand pounds. By my advice she made it into six thousand pounds. Do you mean to tell me that I am to have no voice in the disposal of all this money?"

"This kind of talk will not help anybody. Well; I have had my answer, I suppose. Mary, dear, it is for you to choose between your uncle and me."

"I have chosen, George, you know well. Uncle, you will have to give that money to David or to me. Here is David, and here am I. To which of us will you give it?"

"Suppose, Mary," David interposed—"suppose there



was a secret arrangement—I don't say there is, but suppose there was—between your uncle and me. Suppose that I was to sell my chance for so much down, and he was to keep the rest.”

“Uncle! you would not—you could not—do such a thing!” Mary cried.

“Suppose, I say”—David went on—“that arrangement was to exist. Then, you see, George and Mary”—David put the thing in his slow and deliberate manner, so as to bring out the full meaning of the transaction—“you see that if you don't marry without his consent, he will lose the money he's got to pay me; but if he does not pay me that money before you get married, he will have to pay me the whole afterward. Therefore he naturally wants you to marry without his consent. You are going to play his game for him.”

At this unexpected blow Daniel was covered with confusion. When two people make such a treaty, secrecy is the very essence of it; and for one of the parties concerned to blurt out the truth is, in a sense, a breach of contract. The old man actually turned red—at seventy he had still the grace to blush at being found out in a shameful job—and hung his head, but he could not speak.

“Oh! you have speculated on our marrying without your consent! You have actually bought David's chance, and now you want us to marry, so that you may keep the whole to yourself!”

“Not the whole,” said David. “What will be left after he has bought me out!”

“Mary,” her uncle replied, evading the question, which was not right. “Mary”—his voice was feeble and he trembled—“why do you want to get married yet? Stay with me. Let George stay at Sidcote and be my tenant. And I will consider—I will consider. Besides, think, Mary; I am an old man now, and you will have all my money and all my land when I die.”

“Have you bought up David so that you may keep the money as long as you please, by always refusing your consent? Answer that,” said George, hotly.

“I shall answer nothing,” Daniel replied, angrily—“nothing—nothing! You have come here and asked for my consent to your marriage. Very well; I refuse it. Now you can go.”



"Mary," said George, "it is no longer possible to leave you in this house. Your uncle has deliberately set himself to rob you. Come with me, dear; my mother will take care of you till we are married." Mary hesitated. "Go, Mary, put on your hat, and come with me. As for you, Daniel Leighan"—he waited till Mary had left the room—"we leave you alone. Nothing worse can happen to you. When you have no longer Mary to provide, beforehand, all your wants—when you are alone all the day and all the evening, you will remember what you have thrown away. Oh! you are seventy years of age, and you are rich already, and you rob your sister's daughter in order, for a year or two, to call yourself richer still!"

The old man crouched among his pillows and made no answer. Mary was leaving him. But if she stayed he must give his consent and then he would lose that land. So he made no answer.

Ten minutes later, Mary returned, carrying a small bag in her hand.

"I have come to say good-bye, uncle." Her eyes were full of tears. "I knew that I must choose between George and you. I knew that you would refuse because George could save his land if he had my money, and I knew that your heart was set upon getting his land. But I did not know—oh! I could not guess—that you had planned this wicked thing to get my fortune as well as George's land. Everything that I have is yours; but I suppose you will let me have my clothes as wages for six years' work? Come, George."

"You will go—and leave me—all alone, Mary?"

"I am here still, uncle," said David. "I will come and stay here—I will be with you all day long and every evening. Not alone; you still have me. We shall have a roaring time now that Mary is gone. We will bargain all day long."

The old man looked up, and saw his enemy before him with exulting eyes, and the room empty, save for these two; and he shrieked aloud with terror. David with him always!

"Mary!" he cried, while yet her soft footsteps, gone forever, echoed still about the quiet house. "Mary!" But it was too late. "Come back, Mary! Don't leave me—don't leave me—and you shall marry whom you please! Mary! Mary! I give you my consent! Mary, come back!"



She was gone; and there was no answer. Then he turned his face into the pillows and moaned and wept. Even David had not the heart to mock him in this first moment of his self-reproach and dark foreboding of terror and trouble to come.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE THIRD DREAM.

THE wedding-bells rang out as merrily for Mary as if she was giving her hand to an earl instead of a ruined farmer; as joyfully as if the whole of her life was planned for ease and laziness instead of hard work; as happily as if Fortune had poured into her lap all that the earth can give or the heart can desire. The bells rang out over the whole great parish, from Foxworthy to Hey Tor—from Riddy Rock to Hamil Down. They were echoed along the black precipice of Lustleigh Cleeve and were lost in the woods of Latchell. They could be heard among the gray stones of Grimspound and on the open barrow of King Tor. They drowned the roaring of Becky Fall, though the stream was full. They rolled like mimic thunder from side to side of Becky Coombe. They beat into the ears of the lonely old man who sat in his parlor at Gratnor, his papers before him, trying to persuade himself that he was happy at last, for he had what the Psalmist prayed for—who can have more?—his heart's desire. He had longed ardently for the lands of Sidcote; he had longed in vain, until a fall in land made that become possible which before was impossible. He had that land now within his grasp: the place in a few weeks or months would be his; and not only that, but five-sixths of Mary's fortune as well. He ought to have been a happy man.

Naturally he was by this time deaf to the voice of Conscience, which had now been silent for many years. But when Conscience ceases to upbraid, she stabs, wounds, flogs, and chastises with any weapon which comes handy. And to-day she turned the ringing of the wedding-bells into a flail with which she belabored the soul of Daniel Leighan, so that he could find no rest or peace while they lasted, or after. He had robbed the girl who had served him faith-



fully and affectionately—his sister's child—of her portion. He had taken her husband's lands; he was driving her away to a far country, and he would be left alone. He had the desire of his heart, but he would be left alone. This was almost as much as if Alexander Selkirk had been informed by pigeon-post that he was raised to the Peerage under the title of the Right Honorable the Viscount Juan Fernandez, and that he was condemned to remain for life upon this desert island, there to enjoy alone his title and his coronet.

Mary had left him for three weeks only: already he had found the difference between hired service and the service of love. It is a difference which shows itself in a thousand little things, but they all mean one thing—that the former at best, does what it is paid to do, while the latter does all that it can think of to please, to comfort, and to alleviate. Every day, and all day long, he had turned to Mary for everything, and never found her wanting. Now nothing was right—not even the position of his chair and table, or the arrangement of his cushions, or the comfort of his meals; and nothing would ever be right again. Perhaps it would have been better if he had given his consent, and suffered George to redeem his land, and so kept Mary.

“Uncle”—it was David who came in slowly, and sat down with deliberation—“the wedding is over. I have just come from the church. There was a rare show of people—most as many as on a Sunday morning.”

“Are they married?”

“Yes; they are married. I wouldn't make quite sure till I saw it with my own eyes. Married without your consent, aren't they?”

“Certainly. They have married without my consent.”

“Then, Uncle Daniel, since they are married without your consent, I'll trouble you for six thousand pounds—my aunt's legacy of six thousand pounds—with compound interest for six years at five per cent. It amounts to £7,657 13s. 9d. I have been to a lawyer at Newton-Abbot and he calculated it for me. You lent me, two days ago, a thousand pounds, which I take on account of the legacy, because you knew then that the bans were up and the wedding fixed. The balance you will pay over at once. Otherwise my lawyer will bring an action against you. Halloo! uncle, what's the matter?”



"You took a thousand down, David, in full discharge. It was an arrangement. I owe you nothing."

"Uncle, you are a man of business, I believe. What arrangement do you mean?"

"You told George, in this room, that there was such an arrangement. You set him against me with telling him that, David."

"Where is the arrangement? Where are your papers?"

"David! David!" He fell back in his chair. He had fainted.

David went to the sideboard and got the brandy. When his uncle recovered he gave him a few drops.

"You are simpler than I thought, uncle," he said.

"Did you really believe that I was going to give up this fortune, and to you—to you, of all men in the world—when I knew all along that they would marry without your consent?"

"David, you are a devil!"

"I am what you made me. As for the devil, he has more to do with you than with me, I take it."

"David! David!" he moaned, and wrung his hands, "tell me you are joking."

"Not I! See now, uncle; I am going away. I shall sell you the rest of your coupons, and I shall go away; but before I go I will have that money out of you, to the last farthing. It is not for myself, though; it is for Mary. You thought to cheat her out of her fortune, and to keep it to yourself; well, you are wrong. You shall pay far more to me than you would have paid to her, and she shall have it all."

"You are killing me—oh! villain! villain!"

"The villain is the man who lays his plans to rob and plunder the helpless."

"Kill me at once!" said the old man; "kill me, and have done with me!"

"Kill you? Not I; killing would be foolish with such a chance as I've got now for revenge! As for villain—who robbed me of my land? You! When I went away, who refused me the small sum I wanted to start me in Canada? You! When I came home, who offered me the wages of a laborer? You! Villain? You dare to call any man a villain!" David bent over the old man's chair with flam-



ing eyes and purple cheeks, his hands held back lest he should be tempted to kill him. There was the same fury in his look as when, six years before, he stood before him with upraised cudgel on the moor. If the baron had seen David at that moment he would have ceased to ask how so slow a creature could have been spurred into the blind rage of murder. "You dare to call any man a villain? As you drove me away—your nephew—so you have driven your niece away. As you took my land from me, so you have taken George's land from him. Villain! Well, I am a villain. I have lived with rogues and thieves and savages till I am no longer fit company for a decent man like George, or for an honest man like Harry the blacksmith. But I will go away as soon as I have got the last farthing that can be got out of you: I shall go away, I don't know where—and spend it, I don't know how. As for killing you, man, I've had the heart to do it a dozen times since I came home. Every day when I walk among my fields I could kill you. But I've had enough of murder. Not twice—not twice!" His eyes were wild and his face distorted with ungoverned rage. But still he kept his hands back, as if he dared not suffer them to approach his uncle. And when he had said all he had to say—for this was not all, only the rest was incoherent with splutterings and oaths—he rushed from the room, as if he could not bear even to be in his uncle's company.

And then the old man was left alone again. The wedding-bells were silent, and conscience left him alone to his own reflections. I do not think that he acknowledged even to himself that he was rightly punished for a long life of avarice and greed. Whatever happened, he might bemoan his sad fate, but he would not acknowledge that it was the natural consequence of his iniquities. So, in the good old days, when the retired admiral sat in his room, his foot wrapped in flannel, with a red-hot needle stuck into his great toe and refusing to come out, his jolly old nose swelled as big as a bottle, and beautifully painted with red blossoms, he never said to himself, "Admiral, this red-hot needle, this gout, this swelled nose, all these aches and pains and tortures and inconveniences, which will shortly put an end to you, are the result of the hogsheads, barrels, puncheons, and tuns of rum, brandy, and port which you have imbibed in the course of your earthly pilgrimage."



Not at all; he only cursed the gout, and lamented his own sad fate.

When the new housekeeper brought in the dinner he did not dare, as he would have done in Mary's time, to lay upon her the burden of his own misery and bitterness. She was a fine large woman, who knew what was due to herself, and Mr. Leighan had to treat her with respect. It is a truly dreadful thing not to have a single soul upon whom you may discharge your ill-temper, vent your spleen, and make a sharer in your own miseries. Never again would this poor old man, now tried beyond his powers, be able to command a sympathetic listener; never again would any one pretend to care whether he was in a good temper or not.

"Now, sir," said the housekeeper, "sit up and eat your dinner." It is thus that they address the paupers. Mary, he remembered daily, had been wont to carve for him, to ask him what he would take, and where he liked it cut. Now he was told to sit up and eat his dinner. He noticed these little things more than usual, because when a man has received a heavy blow his mind, for some mysterious reason, begins to notice the smallest trifles. I suppose it is because he loses all sense of proportion as regards other things. Once I read how a murderer was arrested in some lodging where he had taken refuge. On his way out of the house with the officer who had him in charge, he stopped to call his attention to a curious shell upon the mantel-shelf. In the same way Mr. Leighan in his trouble of mind noticed the serving of his dinner.

He obeyed, however, and eat his dinner, which was half cold. Then he mixed himself a much stronger glass of brandy and water than usual, because he was so full of trouble, and filled his pipe. And presently, partly because his mind was so troubled, partly from habit, and partly by reason of the strong brandy and water, he fell asleep as usual.

There was no wedding-breakfast at Sidcote, or any festivities at all—not even a wedding-cake. George drove his bride and his mother home after the service, and presently they had dinner together, and George kissed his wife, and his mother cried, so that there was little outward show of rejoicing. Yet they all three rejoiced in their hearts, and felt stronger and more hopeful, just because they could now stand together.



In the afternoon Mary asked George to go out with her.

"I must go and see my uncle," she said. "I can not bear to think of him alone. Let us ask him to keep his money, but to let us part friends."

They walked hand in hand across the stubble fields, and through the lanes, where the blackberry leaves were putting on their autumn tints of red and gold, and the berries of the hedge were all ripe and red—the purple honeysuckle, the pink yewberry, the blackberry, rowan, hip and haw—to Gratnor.

"Strange, George, that we shall go away, and never see the dear old place again!" said Mary, with a sigh. "Let us go as soon as we can, so as to leave it before the trees are stripped, and while the sun still lies warm upon the hills."

In the parlor Mr. Leighan was still sleeping, though it was past his waking time. Mary touched George by the hand, and they sat down behind him in the window and waited.

They waited for a quarter of an hour.

Then they heard a step outside.

"It is David," George whispered. "He will rouse his uncle. Is he come already to ask for his fortune, I wonder?"

Just then Mr. Leighan awoke, perhaps disturbed by David's heavy step, and he awoke just as he had done twice before—namely, suddenly and with a startled shriek of terror. Just as he had done twice before he sat up in his chair, with horror and fright in his eyes, glaring wildly about the room.

Mary, accustomed to witness this nightmare, looked to see the terror change into bewilderment.

But it did not.

For awhile his mind was full of his dream; while he yet remembered the place, the time, and the man, and before the vision had time to fade and disappear, the very man himself of whom he had dreamed stood before him at the open door. Then he no longer forgot; his dream became a memory: he was riding across Heytree Down in the evening; and he was met by his nephew with a cudgel, and the nephew cried out, "Who robbed me of my land?" and struck him across the temples so that he fell.



“Murderer! Robber!” he cried. “Help! help! I am murdered and robbed!”

And then, lo! a miracle. For the paralytic, who had had no power in his legs for six long years, sprung to his feet and stood with outstretched arms, crying for help to seize the murderer. And David stood before him with such a look of hatred and revenge as he wore on that night, and in his trembling right hand the cudgel ready to uplift and to strike.

It was over in a moment, for the old man fell helpless and senseless upon the floor, though David did not strike. The skull-cap was knocked off by the fall, and exposed the angry red scar of the old wound. He lay upon his back, his arms extended in the fashion of a cross, as he had fallen upon Heytree Down; and as he lay there, so he lay here—with parted lips, streaming hair, and eyes wide open, which saw nothing though they gazed reproachfully upon his murderer. Then for a space no one spoke; but David bent over his uncle, breathing hard, and George and Mary looked on wondering and awe-stricken.

“A second time, David?”

David started, and turned. It was the hand of his German protector, Baron Sergius von Holsten, and the tall figure of the baron stood in the door, accompanied by myself. But on this occasion I counted for nothing.

“A second time, David?”

David gasped, but made no reply.

“You came home, David,” said the baron, “to give yourself in charge for murdering and robbing your uncle. You struck him over the head with your cudgel, so that he fell dead at your feet. You robbed him of a box of papers and a bag of money. The thought of the crime gave you no rest by day, and at night the ghost of your uncle came to your bedside and ordered you to go home and give yourself up. You came home. Your uncle was not dead. Have you confessed the crime?”

David made no reply.

“Have you restored the papers?”

Again he made no reply.

“This is your uncle: he looks as if you had killed him a second time. Madame” — he addressed Mary — “I am



sorry to speak of such things in the presence of a lady, but I have in my pocket the confession of David Leighan."

"He was not killed, after all," said David. "What matters the confession?"

"But he was robbed. Where are the papers?"

"Here they are—all that are left." I observed that he had a big book of some kind under his arm; he laid this on the table. "There are his papers. Now what's the odds of a confession or two?"

"Is this man's presence desired by his uncle?" the baron asked.

"No!" said Mary; "he comes every morning and drives him nearly mad. He had some power over him—I know not what. He has made my uncle's life miserable for three months."

"My duty seems plain," said the baron. "I shall go to the nearest police-station and deposit this confession. They will, I suppose, arrest you, David. You can not, I fear, be hanged, but you will be shut up in prison for a very long time. The wise man, David, flies from dangers against which he can no longer struggle. The door is open." He stood aside. "Fly, David! let fear add wings. The police will be upon you this night if you are still in this village! Fly, David! even if it is once more to face the ghost of your murdered uncle! Better a hundred ghosts than ten years of penal servitude. Fly, David!—fly!"

There remained little more to be told.

David has not since been heard of; and the question whether Mary's fortune was forfeited by her marriage has not been raised. Nor can it be raised now. For Mr. Leighan remained senseless for three days—the same period as that which followed the assault upon him. And when he came to his right mind, behold! it was another mind. He thinks that the whole parish of Challacombe belongs to him—all the farms and cottages, and even the church and the rectory. He is perfectly happy in this belief, and is constantly planning improvements and good works of all kinds. He exists only to do good. He lives with George and Mary, and enjoys not only good health, but also an excellent temper. He always has a bag of money on the table, the handling and music of which give him the most



exquisite pleasure; and in the drawing up of imaginary mortgages, signing vast checks, and watching his imaginary property grow more and more, he passes a happy and a contented old age. His affairs are managed by George, and Mary is his heiress. So that for the present generation, at least, there will be no more talk of going to Tasmania.

THE END.





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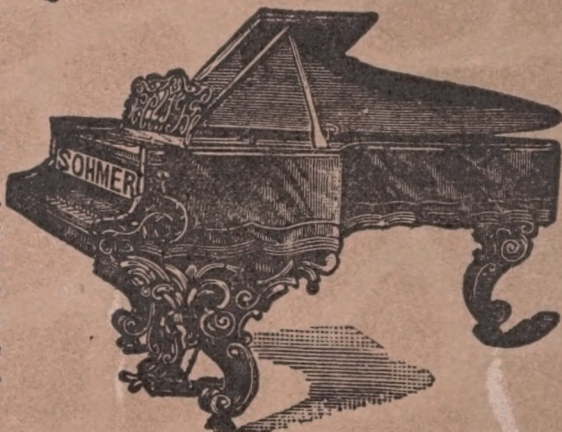


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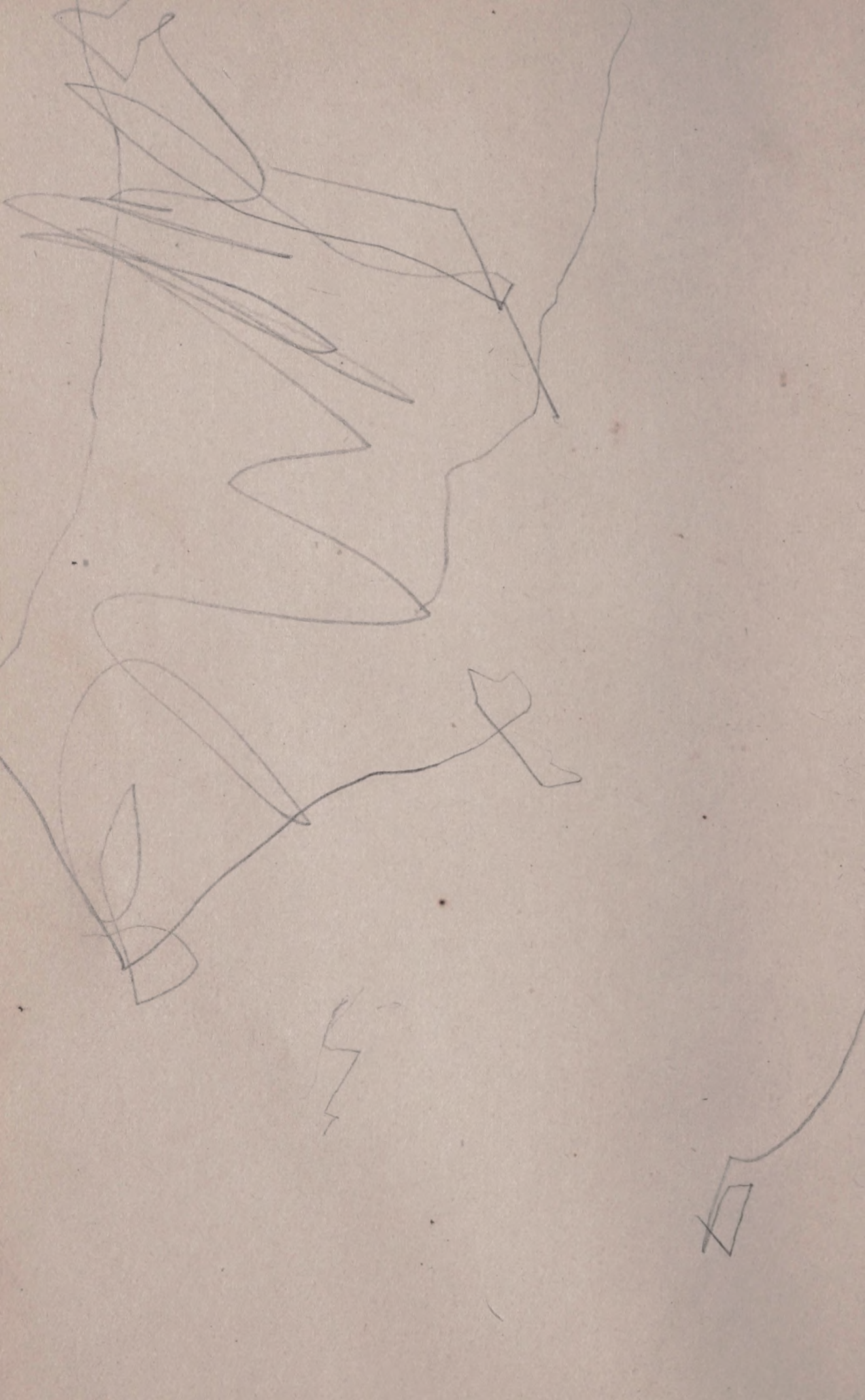
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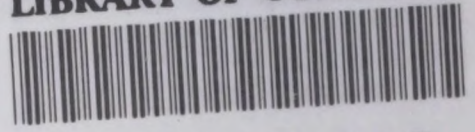








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